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FIRST THINGS

A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life

Men and Women — Can We Be Friends?
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Living at the Borders:
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Opinions and Reviews: Athens & Jerusalem, Again
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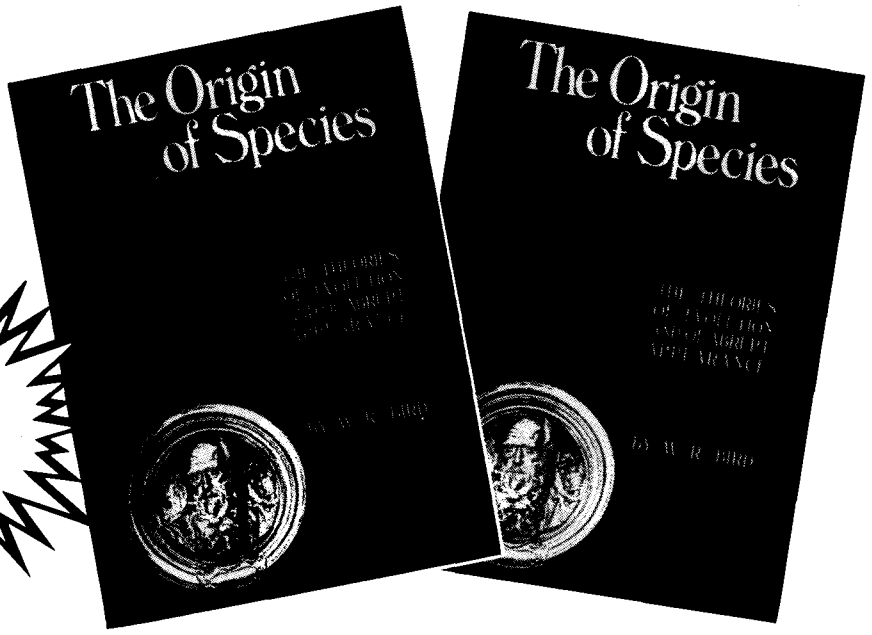

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FIRST THINGS

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Correspondence

Ambassador to the Vatican?

Four false assumptions are operative in your Public Square comment "Reopening Wounds" (March).

The first is that those who oppose the United States sending an ambassador to the Vatican do so because they want to drive religion from the public square.

The second is that Evangelicals who oppose our sending an ambassador to the Vatican harbor anti-Catholic sentiments.

The third is that Evangelicals who oppose our sending an ambassador to the Vatican ignore the fact that Evangelicals are often on the same side as Roman Catholics in the culture wars.

The fourth is that Ronald Reagan's appointment of the first United States ambassador to the Vatican should have settled the issue permanently.

The truth is that there are many Americans who want to see more religious influence in the public square, who harbor no anti-Catholic sentiments, who realize that Evangelicals and Roman Catholics have a great deal in common, and who believe that, Mr. Reagan notwithstanding, this issue is still an open one, who are nevertheless passionately opposed to our having an ambassador at the Holy See. Our reason is that appointing an ambassador to the Vatican is an unnecessary entanglement of our government with a religious body, it achieves nothing that cannot be achieved in other ways, and it is a small but real infringement of our religious liberties to be taxed to support such an ambassador.

What you had hoped was settled during the administration of Mr. Reagan, we had hoped was settled during the administrations of Mr. Jefferson and Mr. Madison.

Fisher Humphreys
Beeson Divinity School
Samford University
Birmingham, AL

I was disturbed and saddened to read "Reopening Wounds" regarding our efforts (along with the National Association of Evangelicals) to convince President Clinton to sever diplomatic relations with the Vatican. I would like to assure you and your readers that "reopening wounds" was not at all our intent in pursuing this matter.

Southern Baptists have opposed the exchange of ambassadors with the Vatican for well over fifty years. Resolutions have been adopted at six annual meetings opposing this policy. We oppose diplomatic ties with the Vatican as a matter of principle, not having anything to do with the particular religion in question. We regard this as a clear violation of the separation of the institutions of church and state provided for in the First Amendment.

Indeed, the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention has "challenged the notion that the separation of church and state requires the separation of religion from public life." We will continue to do so. However, on this matter the violation is absolutely clear to us. The Holy See of the Roman Catholic Church is an ecclesiastical entity. Exchanging ambassadors with the Vatican clearly gives preference to one religion. In asking President Clinton to end relations with the Vatican, we are standing with the mainstream of Baptist (and Protestant) tradition.

This is not to say that the Pope or Roman Catholics in the United States should not attempt to influence public policy and public opinion on a wide array of ethical and social issues. Our agency attempts to do the very same on behalf of Southern Baptists. Attempting to influence policy and exchanging ambassadors, however, are entirely different.

Of particular concern and distress to me is the charge: "Perhaps evangelical leaders are resuscitating [this issue] to demonstrate to their old-guard constituencies that the ecumenical spirit has not entirely overcome their vestigial adherence to a requisite measure of anti-Catholicism." Nothing could be further from the truth. This suggestion is in-

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accurate, offensive, and counterproductive.

Whether in joining with the Religious Alliance Against Pornography and the Pope regarding international anti-pornography efforts or filing with the United States Catholic Conference (and the National Association of Evangelicals) an *amicus* brief before the Supreme Court in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* or in writing a favorable review essay of *Centesimus Annus* for *National Review*, the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention under my leadership has repeatedly demonstrated our commitment to public policy ecumenism with Roman Catholics.

This record of cooperation should be well known to Richard John Neuhaus and also to George Weigel, whom Father Neuhaus quotes. Apart from anti-Baptist or anti-Evangelical bigotry, only ignorance of my advocacy and practice of Evangelical/Catholic cooperative efforts would explain this opprobrious charge. Thus, I am delighted to take this opportunity to once again illumine the public record on this matter, as I have often done privately as well.

Additionally, I must say that I am shocked to see Father Neuhaus advocate one of the things which has resulted in America's "naked public square"—namely politicians who do not practice their faith. He takes umbrage at our request of President Clinton to act on this matter "in light of your Baptist heritage." He says: "One can imagine the public outcry—not least of all from Baptists—were Catholic bishops to urge a Catholic President to make policy 'in light of your Catholic heritage.' " To be sure, some Baptists would complain. However, not us.

Mark Shields, noted Washington pundit and advocate of the "naked public square," has observed (and I paraphrase) that in Washington politicians are expected to be members of a church; they are not, however, expected to practice their faith. Regrettably, Shields is on target. I long for the day when politicians (including our current President), be they Baptist, Catholic, Jew, or whatever, truly would practice their faith. After all, is that not what Catholics desire of Ted Kennedy, Mario Cuomo, and other Catholic politicians? Surely, America would be far better off if this were so. . . .

I will not allow this unfortunate comment to stand in the way of my efforts at achieving Evangelical/Catholic cooperation in rolling back the present state of moral decline in America. As Charles Colson asks in his recent book, *The Body*: "While we may never achieve perfect doctrinal agreement on all points, shouldn't we at least make common cause in defense of our common orthodox faith in Christ and belief in absolute truth?" My answer is yes, and my actions have demonstrated this.

However, the maturity of this ecumenism must recognize our differences. As Colson says in *The Body*, true unity is not sought by pretending that there are no differences, as modern ecumenicists have done, but by recognizing and respecting those differences while focusing on the great orthodox truths all Christians share.

Finally, as I said in an article for *Policy Review* (Winter 1993), "I remain hopeful that the prospect of a President intent on using his office to promote radical cultural and moral changes will awaken conservative evangelicals of all parties and backgrounds and energize them for the nonpartisan interdenominational struggle that lies ahead for the nation's 'soul.' "

Richard D. Land
Executive Director
Christian Life Commission
Southern Baptist Convention
Nashville, TN

Richard John Neuhaus replies:

With great respect for Dr. Land's forthright leadership of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, I would make three points. The Holy See is, as he says, an ecclesiastical entity. As was pointed out in my commentary, it is also a juridical entity with official ties to most countries in the world, including officially Muslim nations. Surely that does not indicate that they are giving preference to one religion over another. The question of preference would only arise were there other entities similarly constituted — Baptist, Lutheran, Buddhist, whatever. There are no others. It is as a civil entity with singular access to the networks of world diplomacy that the U.S. wisely maintains official ties with the Vatican. Second, Dr. Land need not be reminded that it was to Baptist ministers in Houston in 1960 that President Kennedy had to make his pledge that his conduct in office would not be affected by his being a Catholic. Anti-Catholicism is not what it was among Baptists thirty-three years ago, but it is more than "some Baptists" who support an extreme separationist position resulting in the separation of religious commitment from public responsibility that Dr. Land, and we, deplore. Third, in no way is the "opprobrious charge" of anti-Catholicism directed at Richard Land personally. To the contrary, he has been and continues to be a champion of the authentic ecumenism and cooperation described in his letter. I am pleased to offer this public assurance that Dr. Land continues to be a cherished friend and colleague.

A Blessing to Others

Thank you for publishing James Andrew Miller's article "Other Plans: Journal of an Illness" (March). I have passed his words along to two members of our congregation who likewise find their days altered (altared) by the diagnosis of terminal cancer. . . .

Mr. Miller has used his singular ability to write . . . to become a blessing to those who share his condition but lack the ability to express their feelings in such clear words. I hope the opportunity is given to him to pull that book he mentions out of his desk drawer and complete his dream.

(The Rev.) Robert M. A. L. Miller
Grace Lutheran Church
State College, PA

James Andrew Miller's courage in sharing openly his personal battle with cancer is to be commended. It takes great inner strength to deny de-

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nial, to refuse the refusal to accept reality. Cancer is indeed a "violation," a calculating and exploitative enemy that thrives on hope, devours faith, leaves meaninglessness in its wake. I applaud Mr. Miller especially for his self-identification as "terminal." It is perhaps the most difficult, yet most universal, label any of us will ever own. As every premature death reminds us, we are all "terminal, between countries, emigres."

As I write this, my mother, fifty-six, lies two floors above me in a mechanical bed on loan from the hospital. She is dying of metastatic breast cancer that has migrated to her bone marrow, liver, spinal fluid, and uterus. She is strapped to an oxygen tank, hydration bag, morphine pump, and urination catheter. Home care nurses sit by her bed around the clock. Eight years ago she was first diagnosed with a malignant lump. After painful rounds of surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy, she has been given less than two weeks to live.

She too, like Mr. Miller, is handling her fate with the beauty and dignity of one who has embraced the depths of the mystery that is life, who loves God, who, in the midst of inexplicable and undeserved pain, *still* loves God. When she dies she will leave behind a legacy larger than her short span, the message and meaning of which will grow with time. . . .

Thomas K. Carr
Springfield, VA

The Declining Mainline

The article "Mainline Churches: The Real Reason For Decline" (March) by Messrs. Johnson, Hoge & Luidens is a fine contribution to the analysis of the slow wasting disease that afflicts the traditional Protestant churches in America. Although on a world-historical scale the slow slide into irrelevancy of a very small segment of worldwide Christianity merits at best a short footnote, many of us caught in the event see real tragedy.

Although I am generally in agreement with the authors' observations and analysis, their position amounts to a description of the problem rather than an explanation of why it occurred. They may be quite right to define that problem as "the weakening of the spiritual conviction required to generate the enthusiasm and energy needed to sustain a vigorous communal life." This is not an explanation, however, any more than is Dean Kelley's definition of mainline churches as "weak" religious bodies, which is the closest the authors come to supporting any of the theories of decline. . . .

The authors reject what they label as the conservative theory of decline ("people left in protest . . . at the support . . . given left-wing causes") because they do not find in their interviews many people who care much about such issues. In my view this misses the point. The problem with the overtly political, left-wing, social agenda that the leadership of these churches adopted and to a large degree continues to sustain is that once this agenda dominated the church's life ordinary people slowly lost their reason to remain members. It is not that the average churchgoers knew about the activity of the World Council of Churches, the depiction of Russia and the U.S. as morally equivalent, the nuclear freeze movement, the liberation theology, the lack of appreciation and indeed ridicule of capitalism, etc. Most people neither knew or cared about church positions on these issues, but unfortunately the very acceptance of these matters as issues forced discussion of traditional religious questions such as sin, living a Christian life, responding to the different aspects of the Gospel, etc., out of General Conventions, out of seminaries, out of many churches, and eventually out of church members' lives. . . . I would argue strongly that loss of vitality in mainline churches tracks directly with the shift in agenda from "living as the Body of Christ" to "declaring social, political, and economic policy for the larger society.". . .

Michael H. Kenyon
Canton, MA

Fighting the Gnostics

My personal experience as a public critic of the employment of women and homosexuals in the military confirms the effectiveness of Arthur Leff's "the grand sez who," mentioned in your March issue by Phillip Johnson ("Nihilism and the End of Law"). Against all military reasons for admitting women and homosexuals, feminists and gays will invoke a moral imperative that the military simply must make room for both. This is usually expressed as a "right to serve." Rather than attempting a rational argument about which rights we have and don't have, I have found the most effective response is to question the source of all rights: "Where do you get this 'right to serve'? Where is it written in stone? What god has handed this down from on high? No god that I know of. What god do you worship?" The effect can be devastating. . . .

It is becoming plain that on this and many other issues over which our world is now at war, the question at the heart of it all is, what is the name of your god? The arguments we apply to the issues depend entirely upon our theological assumptions. As Johnson shows, against "modernists," who might better be called "gnostics" à la Eric Voegelin, reason is ultimately ineffective, always trumped by their *gnosis*, the belief they hold anterior to reason. . . .

I am afraid that the impotence of reason outside a religious context, as explained by Johnson, means that the alliances that form between members of different faiths will always be ad hoc. There can be no fundamental agreement between fundamentally different religions, say, Christianity and Judaism. The apparent agreement between them on some issues is merely accidental. Christians and Jews might agree on a particular position, but the arguments they employ to advance that position will proceed from different assumptions. Insisting, in the name of the alliance, that both sides give up reference to the religious underpinnings of their argument will hobble all arguments. Dragging religion into the argument may dismay those who wish to see the triumph of "conservatism" without seeing the tri-

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umph of any particular religion, but against the gnostics we have no alternative.

I do not agree with Johnson that Christians should, whenever possible, justify political choices on secular rather than religious grounds. If a man's principal reasons for advocating a policy are religious, he should say so. It is disingenuous for Christians to argue for Sunday blue laws for the sake of "rest and recreation," as Johnson suggests, when they really want blue laws because such laws permit (but not encourage) church attendance. A more honest and probably more effective argument would be for Christians to declare plainly, "I go to church on Sunday and do not want to be obliged by my employer to work on that day." In a time when children's soccer games and other public events are more and more often scheduled on Sunday morning, this argument must more and more often be made, else Christians will find their Sundays taken from them. We should also remember that it is because of our habit of arguing from the least offensive grounds that religion has passed out of our political discourse. The courage and grace to express religious beliefs publicly comes with practice, and we Americans need the practice. . . .

Brian Mitchell
Alexandria, VA

Christian Persecution

I read Richard John Neuhaus' "The Ruling 'We' of the American Jewish Congress" (Public Square, February) with some interest. However, what Neuhaus did *not* say is just as important as what he said.

One of the most important points he failed to include was that of religious and ethnic discrimination. Conveniently enough, he fails to mention that Jews, who have resided in a supposedly "Christian" society since the seventeenth century, and who have made numerous contributions to American culture, have been repeatedly subjected to Christian bigotry, including anti-Semitism, despite the First Amendment. All the colonies—even such tolerant ones as South Carolina, Maryland, and Pennsylvania—refused Jews the right to hold political office, and this continued after the establishment of the United States and the passage of the Bill of Rights. Jews were regularly subjected to discrimination in public life. As only one of many examples: Before banning of prayer in public schools in 1963, Jews and other non-Christians were forced to participate in listening to prayers and Bible-readings *not* within their traditions. If this is not a denial of freedom of worship, what is it? Why must non-Christians accept having their First Amendment rights violated? . . .

Carol Bodenheimer
Winston-Salem, NC

How Many Episcopalians?

In "More Galluping" (Public Square, March), you suggest that the common claim that there are more Muslims in America than there are Episcopalians is untrue. My suggestion is that you take a closer look at the numbers that the Church provides. For example, the Episcopalian Church annual for 1992 (the 1993 annual is in the publication process as I write) does not use the figure of 2,000,000 members to which you refer. It uses two-year-old figures compiled by parish reports which reveal that at that time—three years ago—there were 2.4 million Baptized Members. There were 1.69 million Confirmed Communicants in Good Standing, which represented a decline of one per cent over the previous year's statistics.

One problem is this: what does that mean? It used to mean something, because many years ago priests were obligated to abide by the Prayer Book rubrics which said that only Baptized Members in Good Standing were to receive Communion. That is no longer true, so this statistic is not taken seriously anymore.

A more recent statistic is more relevant—my source is my former Pastoral Theology Professor at Nashotah House Episcopal Seminary, Dr. Charles Caldwell. On the three highest Holy Days of the year the average total attendance at Episcopalian parishes was 800,000. I would suggest that on any given Sunday in America, based on this statistic, there are fewer than 500,000 Episcopalians in the pews. I would say that that constitutes the minimal standard of Church affiliation. I would argue that the Muslim population is probably larger than the Episcopalian population, and undoubtedly far more committed.

(The Rev.) Owen Jones
Rose Hill Foundation
Aiken, SC

Revisionist History

I enjoyed reading "The Compleat and Authentick Historie of the Conquest of New Spain" (Public Square, February), but as you suspect, an inauthentic note has crept into the text. Your version reads: "The principal industry of the colonialists was making lewd remarks at the Indian maidens and exporting the reactions to the *mother country* in exchange for tattoos of Pope Innocent VIII." Surely, given the tone of this document as a whole, the original wording must have been "father country."

Anthony Low
Ridgefield, CT

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Opinion

Athens and Jerusalem, Again

Peter J. Leithart

President Clinton's push to lift the ban on homosexuals in the military has been called many things: a waste of political capital, a declaration of war against biblical morality, a declaration of war against the warrior class. I call it calling a bluff.

For decades, conservatives have celebrated Greece and Rome as foundational pillars of Western civilization. The late Allan Bloom, hailed by many conservatives for his assault on the modern university, claimed that Plato's *Republic* was for him *the* great book on education. While honoring Christianity as a major contributor to Western civilization, conservatives have attempted to defend a cultural synthesis of Jerusalem and Athens that currently goes by the name of "traditional values."

This synthesis is not, of course, an invention of twentieth-century conservatism. On the contrary, from the earliest centuries the West has been built upon its foundation. Despite its endurance, however, the cracks in this inherently unstable synthesis are becoming more evident as the twentieth century slouches toward a close. Particularly on abortion, homosexual rights, and other sexually related issues, the historic pretense of amiability between Athens and Jerusalem is eroding. Contemporary Athenians now think they can get along well enough without meddling from Jerusalem. And inhabitants of Jerusalem are shocked at what appears to be the sudden hostility of Athenians who once seemed content to help construct the walls and towers of the city of God.

From this perspective, Clinton's proposal emerges as a simple demand that the defenders of the Greco-Christian synthesis put up or shut up. It was in Plato's *Symposium*, after all, that Phaedrus made the suggestion that an army "made up of lovers and their loves" would "overcome the world," since each soldier would rather die than act the coward in the presence of his lover. As Paul Kahn has recently explained in *The New Republic*, Plato himself saw this proposal as a dangerous confusion of public and private love. Still, Socrates agreed with the suggestion made in the *Republic* that heroes of battle should be rewarded by a kiss from each of their fellows; in this way, "if there be a lover in the army, whether his love be youth or maiden, he may be more eager to win the prize of valor." Clinton's action throws down the gauntlet: If a gay army is a "traditional" notion, why don't the defenders of "traditional values" support it?

It would be an evasion to say that these hints of ancient support for homosexuals in the military are unrepresentative. In fact, homosexuality, or pederasty, was an important part of Greek civilization. Greek pederasty was not, to be sure, what we call pederasty (sodomy with an immature boy); it was normally a homosexual relationship between a mature man and a post-adolescent young man. Moreover, it was in all probability limited to certain elites; all evidence suggests that the majority of Greeks maintained heterosexual monogamy. Scholarly admirers of Greek civilization have in the past argued strenuously that pederasty was a purely spiritual ideal, but archeological evidence, not least from many a Grecian urn, unequivocally proves the contrary. It cannot be denied that sodomy (pederastic and otherwise) was not only practiced, but was also held up as an ideal.

As Henri Marrou says in his history of ancient education, "Pederasty, like the athletic nudity with which it was once closely connected, was one of the distinguishing marks of Hellenism—one of the practices in which it contrasted most sharply with the 'barbarians,' and hence in its own eyes one of the privileges establishing the nobility of the civilized man." This general assessment is supported by H.D.F. Kitto, who, in commenting on the relations of men and women in Greece, notes that "the romantic attachments that we do hear of are with boys and young men, and of these we hear very frequently: homosexual love was regarded as a normal thing and treated as frankly as heterosexual love."

Classicist Oswyn Murray has emphasized that the institution of the "*symposium* provided the focus for liaisons of both 'earthly' and 'spiritual' types, whether in relation to fellow drinkers or the slave boys." Murray relates the *symposium* to another distinctively Greek institution, the *gymnasion*: "Young men spent much of their day at the *gymnasion* where they exercised naked, pursued their loved ones, or passed time in conversation. It is no accident that two famous *gymnasia*, the Academy and the Lyceum, gave their names to two famous schools of philosophy, those of Plato and Aristotle; for these philosophers had established their activities deliberately in proximity to the exercise grounds."

In Plato's *Symposium*, Phaedrus provided a "theological" argument for the superiority of pederastic love. He noted that Eros is the offspring of the goddess Aphrodite, but added that there are two Aphrodites, the common and the heavenly. The Eros that comes from the common Aphrodite "has no dis-

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crimination, being such as the meaner sort of men feel, and is apt to be of women as well as of youths, and is of the body rather than of the soul." Love that springs from the heavenly Aphrodite, by contrast, "is derived from a mother in whose birth the female has no part—she is from the male only; this is that love which is of youths, and the goddess being older, there is nothing of wantonness in her. Those who are inspired by this love turn to the male, and delight in him who is the more valiant and intelligent nature; any one may recognize the pure enthusiasts in the very character of their attachments. For they love not [little] boys, but intelligent beings whose reason is beginning to be developed, much about the time at which their beards begin to grow." In short, pederastic love is superior because it combines the love of a beautiful body and the love of a beautiful soul—a combination, so Phaedrus seemed to think, rarely, if ever, to be found in a woman.

The point is that what Clinton's opponents are really defending is not "traditional morality" but an ordering of sexuality that derives from the Bible. Failure to distinguish the two will, in the long run, prove counterproductive. The fault lines that separate Jerusalem and Athens are becoming too pronounced to accommodate fence-sitters, and those who combat Clinton in the name of undefined "traditional values" are wielding blunted weapons. Clinton has called the conservative bluff; he has, probably unconsciously, exposed the scam of "traditional values." His opponents had best seize the opportunity to oppose his program on forthrightly biblical grounds.

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The Newtape File IV

Dear Nephew, my impish one,
You seem to have grasped the point about eviscerating distinctions of any serious content. I am delighted to witness the scenes of domestic discord, and you coached young Bud wonderfully in the donnybrook with Mother Smith. She seems rather shaken, fretting, as any good American must, about whether she is in fact unduly curbing her young son's high-spiritedness and "freedom of expression." Keep up the godless work. There may even be a bonus come No Saints Day. May I instruct you briefly on several other fine points in the distinctionlessness in behalf of which we must all put our shoulders to the wheel.

My first example is victimization. We must promote this idea and encourage everyone to find a grievance—a gaping, voracious wound that must continuously be fed. The worst possible outcome for us would be a restoration of human self-respect. So long as we can convince these gullible creatures that they are always menaced by something outside their puny selves—that what they call evil (our own delectable goodness, in other words) is outside "the self" and any nastiness on their own parts has somehow been implanted by others—we put them on the sure and certain low road.

No doubt, my little fiend, this sounds mysterious to you. But it is really quite simple. Our Father Below's great demiurgic allies planted the Manichean notion eons ago that evil was its own autonomous principle, a great and gloriously destructive force. The saying, "The Devil Made Me Do It," although turned and twisted by noxious humans into something of a joke, really expresses our sort of Truth. So long as we convince people that they are not responsible, so long as we encourage them to whine and moan and whimper over any slight, so long as we encourage them to disdain any distinction between a snub and slavery (each creates victims!), our side can breathe easier.

A second example. I know you will lap it up eagerly with that purple tongue of yours. Convince as many as you can that "family values" is whatever anybody says it is. What finer example of distinction riddance could we hope for? The media once again are enormously helpful. Although much of the data shows how "ordinary people" continue to daunt us somewhat, they are in the direct line of fire by our allies. For example, 49 percent of top television writers and executives believe adultery is wrong, but 85 percent of "everybody else" find it so. I say, look on the gloomy bright side. We are half there with the entertainment moguls. I find myself so cheered every day by the way statistical abuse plays into our hands my temperature drops by 10-15 degrees. Recently, for example, I read that only one in five families fits the Ozzie and Harriet model. When people read this they believe it means only one in five families consists of two parents with children. Not at all, my uncuddly one! Sleight of hand is a great thing. It means that only one of five families consists of a father who is the sole wage earner, a mother who works for pay not-at-all, and two, precisely two, children. How delectable! And how the social scientists line up with us: we have so many recruits from sociology and political science we have had to add clerks to our Higher Education for Lower Purposes division. A wretched fellow named David Blankenhorn keeps trying to put out accurate information on this score, but I am determined that you not have precise information on what he calls "the truth" for fear you might inadvertently let the cat out of the bag that the vast majority of fam-

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ilies consist of a mother and father with children.

I read a definition of family the other day that would suit our purposes if we could strip it of all humor. Unfortunately, as written, the description evokes laughter and perhaps moments of recognition on the part of those not solidly in our camp. I include it here but please do not, I repeat, do not under any circumstances, permit this to circulate in its present funny form. What we must do is get this or a similar definition accepted as solemn "truth": family (n.) A social unit involving a mother, a father, and children; a father, a father, and children; a mother, a mother, and children; a father and children; a mother and children; children and children; a social worker and children; a lawyer and a child; the Children's Defense Fund, lawyers, and a child; or any group of people who appear together on "Donahue."

I know we are making serious headway when the current superstar of country music, one obnoxiously nice chap named Garth Brooks, includes a song called "Freedom of Choice" on his most recent album. It is a marvel of distinction erosion and particularly effective coming, as it does, from such a decent fellow. Fortunately for us, he is naive, as he has swallowed wholesale our statistics and proclaims that those who proclaim traditional family values "believe family values are June and Walt and 2.3 children. To me it [family values] means laughing, being able to dream." Then he goes on to offer up in all seriousness the definition of family as any arrangement that makes people happy and healthy.

This may—just may—disqualify a truly estimable story that I clipped the other day about family values as no values at all. A pregnant singer named Courtney Love posed, large with child, for *Vanity Fair* with a smoldering cigarette between her fingers. She confesses to "her long love affair with the painkiller Percodan and with heroin, which she says she used during the first trimester." In fact, she and hubby, a punk rocker named Kurt Cobain of a group called Nirvana (they thanked Satan for their MTV music-video award on the annual show, a real high point for me), used "a lot of drugs" and "copped dope" and decided to get pregnant because it was a "bad time" to do so and because she and hubby "need new friends." Need I add that Demonica, the force majeure behind this delicious debacle, was dishonored recently by Our Father Below with an Infernal Hall of Fame membership at our annual awards ritual.

You have much to aspire to and I want you to step up your efforts with young Bud Smith. He remains glum around his mother but he continues to accompany the family to church. This must stop.

Your affectionate uncle,
Newtape

JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN, *to whom the contents of the Newtape File were originally leaked, teaches political philosophy at Vanderbilt University.*

Drouth

I invoke the air in rage,
am like a cancer in a cage—
only myself to burn, to burn;
mere glass and sun on an empty stage.

Pick and spade, curse and yearn—
agatefulls are struck and turned,
one by one and year by year,
until the hollow has been earned.

Now the reckoning is near,
now the starlings rise in fear;
a shadow sweeps across the page
and I was music, talking here.

Kent Gramm

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Men and Women—Can We Be Friends?

Gilbert Meilaender

In Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, Socrates and Critobulus are discussing household management, in which the wife plays a major role. The exchange goes this way:

> "Anyhow, Critobulus, you should tell us the truth, for we are all friends here. Is there anyone to whom you commit more affairs of importance than you commit to your wife?"
> "There is not."
> "Is there anyone with whom you talk less?
> "There are few or none, I confess."

Friendship between husband and wife is, of course, only one possible kind of friendship between the sexes, though an important one. But most classical thinkers—with the exception of Epicurus—were inclined to think friendship between men and women impossible.

No doubt this can be accounted for in part, perhaps large part, by social and cultural circumstances—differences in education, a public life from which most women were excluded, constant warfare that drew males away from home. In my own view, these circumstances have changed considerably, but not everyone agrees. Thus, for example, Mary Hunt, author of *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship* (1991), says: "Economic, political, psychological, and other differences between the genders result in the fact that women find it difficult to be friends with men and vice versa." Though I think Hunt is somewhat mistaken about the reasons, it is true that the relation between the sexes is in our society a tense and often anxious one. It still makes sense to ask the classical question: Is friendship possible between men and women? Or, more modestly put, are there reasons why friendship between men and women may be more difficult to sustain than same-sex friendships?

When we ask this question, the first problem that comes to mind is the one raised by Harry Burns in the 1989 movie, *When Harry Met Sally*. In the opening scene, as he and Sally are driving together from Chicago to New York, Harry says: "Men and women can't be friends—because the sex part always gets in the way." Harry has a point—indeed, an important point. And, though I do not think that this is finally the deepest issue that confronts us here, I shall devote a good bit of attention to it.

Aristotle, whose two books on friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* are recognized almost universally as the most important piece of writing on the subject, tends to agree with Harry. Aristotle recognizes, of course, that there is a kind of friendship between husband and wife, but it is one example of what he calls friendship between unequals. In such bonds the equality that friendship always requires can be present only if it is "proportionate" rather than "strict"—only, that is, if "the better and the more useful partner . . . [receives] more affection than he gives." Still, of the three types of friendship that Aristotle discusses—based respectively on advantage, pleasure, or character—the highest, based on character, can exist even between unequals as long as the

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proportion is present. And Aristotle seems to think that, given the necessary proportionate equality, such a character friendship is possible between husband and wife.

More generally, however, Aristotle suggests that a relation grounded in erotic love will not be the highest form of friendship. (When he takes up the question, he has in mind, it would seem, pederastic relationships, but this does not affect his view of the relation between eros and philia.) He distinguishes a bond like friendship, grounded in a trait of character and involving choice, from a bond grounded in an emotion. And, while there can be friendship between lover and beloved, it will not be the highest form of friendship. It will be a friendship grounded not in character but in pleasure—and it is, therefore, likely to fade. "Still," Aristotle grants, noting how one sort of love may grow from another, "many do remain friends if, through familiarity, they have come to love each other's character, [discovering that] their characters are alike."

It is important to note that eros and philia are indeed different forms of love, even if they may sometimes go together. In making a somewhat different point, C. S. Lewis suggested the following thought experiment:

> Suppose you are fortunate enough to have "fallen in love with" and married your Friend. And now suppose it possible that you were offered the choice of two futures: "*Either* you two will cease to be lovers but remain forever joint seekers of the same God, the same beauty, the same truth, *or else*, losing all that, you will retain as long as you live the raptures and ardors, all the wonder and the wild desire of Eros. Choose which you please."

In recognizing the reality and difficulty of the choice we discern the difference between the loves. That difference Lewis captures nicely in a sentence: "Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; Friends, side by side, absorbed in some common interest." Friends, therefore, are happy to welcome a new friend who shares their common interest, but eros is a jealous love that must exclude third parties.

Lewis believes that friendship and erotic love may go together, but in many respects he agrees with Harry and with Aristotle that the combination is an unstable one. He suggests that friendship between a man and a woman is likely to slip over into eros unless either they are physically unattractive to each other, or at least one of them already loves another. If neither of these is the case, friendship is "almost certain" to become eros "sooner or later." This is not far from Harry's view of the matter. Having asserted that "men and women can't be friends—because the sex part always gets in the way," Harry adds a corollary when he and Sally meet again five years later: "unless both are involved with other people." But then, in one of his characteristically convoluted pieces of reasoning, he adds: "But that doesn't work. The person you're involved with can't understand why you need to be friends with the other person. She figures you must be secretly interested in the other person—which you probably are. Which brings us back to the first rule." A little more optimistic than Harry, Lewis suggests that lovers who are also friends may learn to share their friendship with others, though not, of course, their eros. Still, that does not address Harry's chief concern: the instability of friendships with members of the opposite sex when those friendships are not shared with one's beloved.

We ought not, I think, deny that friendships between men and women—friendships that are not also marked by erotic love—are possible. We ought not, that is, let a theory lead us to deny the reality we see around us, and we do sometimes see or experience such friendships. Nor need we express the view shared by Harry and Lewis quite as crassly as did Nietzsche: "Women can enter into a friendship with a man perfectly well; but in order to maintain it the aid of a little physical antipathy is perhaps required." Nor, surely, need we hold, as my students sometimes do, that friendship between men and women is possible only if at least one of the friends is homosexual (a view that will make same-sex friendships difficult for those who are homosexual, unless, of course, their experience of eros is in no way jealous or exclusive). At the same time, however, there is no reason to deny some truth to Harry's claim, even without the additional support provided by Aristotle and Lewis, for our experience also suggests that there is something to it.

The difficulties of combining eros and philia are the stuff of our daily life. Equalizing the relation of the sexes, bringing women into the academy and the workplace, has not made these difficulties disappear. Indeed, in certain respects they may have been exacerbated. Men and women are radically uncertain about how they are to meet in such shared worlds. Friendship requires an easy spontaneity, a willingness to say what one thinks, talk with few holds barred and few matters off limits—precisely the sort of thing that some will find difficult on occasion to distinguish from sexual harassment.

I have discovered that college students often wish to argue that Harry is wrong, that there need be no obstacle to friendship between the sexes. That, however, may be because they have great difficulty managing erotic attachments (which are quite a different thing from sexual encounters). Fearful of the kind of commitment eros asks of us—fearful of being drawn toward one who is completely other than the self but to whom the most complete self-giving is called for and before whom one therefore becomes vulnera-

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ble—they take refuge in groups of friends, hoping thereby to achieve what parents of thirty years ago saw as the advantage of group dating: the domestication of eros. But eros is a wild and unruly deity, unlikely, I think, to be tamed so easily.

It is wiser to grant the point. Friendship between men and women will always have to face certain difficulties that will not be present in same-sex friendships. There will almost always be what J. B. Priestley calls "a faint undercurrent of excitement not present when only one sex is involved." This may even give to the friendship a tone not easily gotten any other way. Thus, as Priestley again puts it: "Probably there is no talk between men and women better than that between a pair who are not in love, have no intention of falling in love, but yet who *might* fall in love, who know one another well but are yet aware of the fact that each has further reserves yet to be explored." Priestley offered this opinion in a little book titled, *Talking: An Essay*, published in 1926 as one of several volumes in "The Pleasures of Life Series." But he might well have been describing what many viewers found appealing in *When Harry Met Sally*. In one scene, Harry and his friend Jess are talking while hitting some balls in a batting cage:

> Jess: "You enjoy being with her?"
> Harry: "Yeah."
> Jess: "You find her attractive?"
> Harry: "Yeah."
> Jess: "And you're not sleeping with her?"
> Harry: "I can just be myself, 'cause I'm not trying to get her into bed."

And yet, of course, not too much later comes the party at which Harry and Sally dance cheek to cheek—and recognize the presence of Priestley's "faint undercurrent," which we call eros. This is, let us face it, a problem for friendships between men and women, even if it may also be enriching. Eros always threatens; for, unlike friendship, eros is a love that is jealous and cannot be shared.

If we grant this, we may not agree with Mary Hunt, whom I quoted earlier. She ascribes the difficulties facing friendship between men and women to "economic, political, psychological, and other differences"—unwilling, almost, to admit the power and presence of erotic attraction between men and women in human life. Nonetheless, it may be worth thinking briefly about what she recommends: namely, "new models of mutuality" which are most easily found among women friends. We ought not, she argues, take Aristotle's model of friendship and suppose that he simply forgot to include women when he talked and wrote of it—an omission we can then easily correct. We should not take his model and then just add women's experience "as if they should have been there in the first place."

What is mistaken about Aristotle's model? Chiefly, it seems, that "[h]e considered friendship something that decreased in quality as it increased in quantity; the more intense the friendship, the fewer people with whom it was possible to enjoy it." Thus, according to Hunt, women need not worry about classifying friendships as carefully as did Aristotle, nor need they worry about whether friends are best friends or just good friends. "Only ruling-class men whose survival is not in question have the dubious luxury of looking up and down at their friends, companions, and acquaintances." Women, by contrast, in a society which—in Hunt's view—is oppressive, cannot concern themselves with levels of friendship. For them the simple truth is that "friends, lots of them, are necessary for . . . survival in an often unfriendly environment." Paradoxically, however, to the degree that Hunt's assessment is correct, her thesis can have little to do with friendship between men and women or, even, between those of the same sex. For, by her own account, women would have every reason to seek as many women *and* men as possible to be friends, and men who were not "ruling-class men" would be in similar circumstances. Neither would have reason to seek the kind of close, particular, and preferential friendships that Aristotle—and many others since—have considered the highest form of friendship.

What Hunt seems not to realize is that she is, in fact, like Aristotle in at least one important way. "How," Aristotle asks, sounding very much like Hunt, "could prosperity be safeguarded and preserved without friends? . . . Also, in poverty and all other kinds of misfortune men believe that their only refuge consists in their friends." As it stands in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, of course, this is for Aristotle only one of the received opinions about friendship that he will refine, and it will turn out that this is not for him the highest form of friendship. More important, however, for Aristotle friendship is not only a particular and preferential bond that must be limited in number. He knows also a different kind of friendship, which we call "civic friendship"; indeed, for him philia is the bond that joins together the members of any association. The concept of civic friendship deserves more attention than we can give it here. We need to ask whether it is coherent, whether *we* really wish to call it "friendship," and whether—if there is a coherent notion and we do call it friendship—it is helpful or harmful in life. Those who, like Hunt, emphasize such a concept of friendship may, despite their political concerns, have difficulty explaining one of the terrible things about injustice: how it may deprive us of the "luxury" of a *private* bond like friendship. But in any case, in her emphasis upon friendship as a public, political relation, Hunt is far more like Aristotle than she realizes; but, lacking his interest in those more private bonds we have in mind when speaking of friendship, she can shed little light on the problems of friendship

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between men and women.

These problems go deeper than the presence of erotic attraction alone. They involve the very nature of the bond of friendship. The friend is, in Aristotle's influential formulation, "another self." At several points, Aristotle considers whether friendship is more probable among those who are like or unlike each other. And, although he notes defenders of each view, he holds that friendship "implies some similarity" and that in the highest form of friendship "the partners are like one another." In arguing that a person of good character should not—and ultimately cannot—remain friends with someone who becomes evil, Aristotle again appeals to the notion that "like is the friend of like."

Anyone who reads Aristotle's discussion of the friend as another self is likely to find it puzzling in certain respects. It grows out of a peculiar treatment of self-love as the basis of friendship, of love for the friend as an extension of the friendly feelings one has for oneself. And there are, in fact, aspects of his discussion that I would not claim fully to understand. What he has in mind, however, in depicting the friend as an alter ego is something *we* might discuss in terms of the social origins of the self. The friend is the mirror in which I come to know and understand myself. I have no way to look directly at myself and must come to see myself as I am reflected by others—and especially, perhaps, by close friends. In the friend I find that other self in whom I come to know myself. That is why friendship "implies some similarity" and why, at least in the most important kinds of friendship, "the partners are like one another."

Friends wish, Aristotle says, to pursue together activities they enjoy. "That is why some friends drink together or play dice together, while others go in for sports together and hunt together, or join in the study of philosophy: whatever each group of people loves most in life, in that activity they spend their days together." I myself think that Aristotle is largely correct here. We want in the friend someone who cares about the things we care about; yet we want the friend to be "another" who cares about these things, another with whom we can share them and with whom we come to know ourselves (and our concerns) better. The friend must be "another," but not entirely "an-other." Perhaps we do not, therefore, seek from the friend quite that sense of otherness which the opposite sex provides.

This takes us beyond the issue of erotic attraction alone—into much deeper, perhaps unanswerable, questions about what it means to be male or female. I do not know precisely how we can make up our minds about these questions today; we have a hard enough time just discussing them openly and honestly. A child of either sex begins in a kind of symbiotic union with its mother, without any strong sense of differentiation between self and mother. But as that sense of self begins to form, it develops differently for males and females. In attaining a sense of the self as separate and individuated we take somewhat different courses. Thus, psychologist Lillian Rubin argues, boys must repress their emotional identification with their mother, while girls, though repressing any erotic attachment, can leave the larger emotional identification with the mother (and, more generally, other women) intact. The process of becoming a self involves identification with those who can be for us "another self"—those, as it happens, who share our sex.

This does not, in my view, mean that friendship between men and women is impossible. It does mean, though, that J. B. Priestley was right to say of their "talk": "It will be different from the talk of persons of the same sex." These differences are the stuff of best sellers—and of much humor. Thus, for example, Deborah Tannen, who teaches linguistics at Georgetown University, could write a best-seller titled, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. Full of illustrations in which one often sees oneself, Tannen's book suggests that for men life is "a struggle to preserve independence," while for women it is "a struggle to preserve intimacy." The sort of problem this creates is illustrated clearly in a story Tannen recounts:

> Eve had a lump removed from her breast. Shortly after the operation, talking to her sister, she said that she found it upsetting to have been cut into, and that looking at the stitches was distressing because they left a seam that had changed the contour of her breast. Her sister said, "I know. When I had my operation I felt the same way." Eve made the same observation to her friend Karen, who said, "I know. It's like your body has been violated." But when she told her husband, Mark, how she felt, he said, "You can have plastic surgery to cover up the scar and restore the shape of the breast."

Where she felt the need for understanding and sharing, he discerned a problem to be solved.

If this can sometimes be disconcerting, we need not be too serious. And these differences have provided the occasion for much humor. Dave Barry, the columnist, can title a column "Listen up, jerks! Share innermost feelings with her"—and most of us are likely to read it. "We have some good friends," Barry writes,

> Buzz and Libby, whom we see about twice a year. When we get together, Beth and Libby always wind up in a conversation, lasting several days, during which they discuss virtually every significant event that has occurred in their lives and the lives of those they care about, sharing their innermost feelings, analyzing and prob-

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ing, inevitably coming to a deeper understanding of each other, and a strengthening of a cherished friendship. Whereas Buzz and I watch the play-offs.

This is not to say Buzz and I don't share our feelings. Sometimes we get quite emotional.

"That's not a FOUL?" one of us will say.

Or: "You're telling me THAT'S NOT A FOUL???"

I don't mean to suggest that all we talk about is sports. We also discuss, openly and without shame, what kind of pizza we need to order. We have a fine time together, but we don't have heavy conversations, and sometimes, after the visit is over, I'm surprised to learn—from Beth, who learned it from Libby—that there has recently been some new wrinkle in Buzz's life, such as that he now has an artificial leg.

Our world is full of attempts, not always terribly humorous, to remove such differences from life. In Tannen's words, "Sensitivity training judges men by women's standards, trying to get them to talk more like women. Assertiveness training judges women by men's standards and tries to get them to talk more like men." Better, perhaps, she suggests, to learn to understand and accept each other.

In this effort, I have found Priestley's old essay quite helpful. If talk between men and women is different from talk between persons of the same sex, it will not give the same kind of pleasure. But it may, Priestley suggests, compensate in other ways. The *first* condition of such talk is, he says, "that sex must be relegated to the background. . . . The man and the woman must be present as individualities, any difference between them being a strictly personal and not a sexual difference. They will then discover, if they did not know it before, how alike the sexes are, once their talk has dug below the level of polite chatter and they are regarding the world and their experience together and not merely flirting." That is, to revert to the terms I drew from Aristotle, they must find in the friend another self, another individuality, but one whose otherness is not so overwhelming as to threaten to engulf or invade their selfhood. No doubt this is not always possible, for reasons we noted earlier when considering the impact of eros on friendship. But when, for whatever reason, "passion is stilled," men and women may meet as individualities who care about the same things or seek the same truth.

There may, however, be something dissatisfying about the suggestion that a crucial aspect of our person—our sexuality—must, as it were, be bracketed for such friendship to be possible. And this *would* be unsatisfactory, I think, were no more to be said. Priestley goes on, though, to suggest that friendship between men and women can go beyond the play of individual personalities. "Secure in this discovery" of how alike they are, men and women "will then go forward and make another one, for at some point they must inevitably discover how unlike the sexes are. . . . This double play, first of personality and then of sex, is what gives intelligent talk between men and women its curious piquancy. . . ."

In this second movement, when individual personality no longer brackets sexuality, Priestley ultimately discerns something more fundamental still—a third factor, which goes beyond the level of individual identity. "Men frequently complain," he writes, "that women's conversation is too personal." And, even writing in an age that knew not Carol Gilligan, Priestley finds some truth in this judgment. I will quote him at length:

> [Women] remain more personal in their interests and less concerned with abstractions than men on the same level of intelligence and culture. While you are briskly and happily generalizing, making judgments on this and that, and forgetting for the time being yourself and all your concerns, they are brooding over the particular and personal application and are wondering what hidden motive, what secret desire, what stifled memory of joy or hurt, are there prompting your thought. But this habit of mind in women does not spoil talk; on the contrary it improves it, restoring the balance. . . . It is the habit of men to be overconfident in their impartiality, to believe that they are godlike intellects, detached from desires and hopes and fears and disturbing memories, generalizing and delivering judgment in a serene mid-air. To be reminded of what lies beyond, now and then, will do them more good than harm. This is what the modern psychologist does, but too often he shatters the illusion of impersonal judgment with a kick and a triumphant bray, like the ass he so frequently is, whereas woman does it, and has done it these many centuries, with one waggle of her little forefinger and one gleam of her eyes, like the wise and witty and tender companion she is. Here, then, is a third kind of play you may have in talk between the sexes, the duel and duet of impersonal and personal interests, making in the end for balance and sanity and, in the progress of the talk, adding to its piquancy.

In this sense, friendship between the sexes may take us not out of ourselves but beyond ourselves—may make us more whole, more balanced and sane, than we could otherwise be.

Indeed, I myself think that this is one of the purposes of friendship. And by such teleological language I mean: one of the purposes God has in giving us friends. We are being prepared ultimately for that vast friendship which is heaven, in which we truly

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are taken beyond ourselves, and in which all share the love of God. Something like this understanding of friendship, though without the strong theological overtone I have just given it, can be found in Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia*—a book about, among other things, friendship, and a book that it would be misleading to describe simply as a children's book.

The friendship in the book is one between a boy and a girl, Jess and Leslie, though they are a little too young for eros yet to have an overt impact on their relationship. In different ways they are both outsiders in the world of their peers at school, and that very fact draws them together. They create—largely at the instigation of Leslie—a "secret country" named Terabithia, in which they are king and queen. This country—a piece of ground on the other side of a creek, to which they swing across on a rope—is, in Leslie's words, "so secret that we would never tell anyone in the whole world about it." And, at least at first, it must be that way. Were they to follow Mary Hunt's advice, were no friendships of theirs to be special and particular, were they to have no secret country that others did not share, they would never come to know themselves as fully as they do. Thus, for example, Jess finds that his friendship with Leslie opens up new worlds for him. "For the first time in his life he got up every morning with something to look forward to. Leslie was more than his friend. She was his other, more exciting self—his way to Terabithia and all the worlds beyond."

Jess says that Leslie is his way not only to Terabithia but also to "all the worlds beyond," but he learns that truth only slowly and with great bitterness. When the creek is swollen from a storm and Jess is gone, Leslie still tries to cross to Terabithia on the rope. It breaks, she falls onto the rocks, and is killed. Grief-stricken and alone, without his alter ego, Jess can barely come to terms with what has happened. But he does, finally, and in doing so learns something about the purpose of all friendship.

> It was Leslie who had taken him from the cow pasture into Terabithia and turned him into a king. He had thought that was it. Wasn't king the best you could be? Now it occurred to him that perhaps Terabithia was like a castle where you came to be knighted. After you stayed for a while and grew strong you had to move on. For hadn't Leslie, even in Terabithia, tried to push back the walls of his mind and make him see beyond to the shining world—huge and terrible and beautiful and very fragile?

To learn to see beyond our own secret countries—to what is at the same time both terrible and beautiful—is, from the perspective of Christian faith, the purpose of friendship. And to the degree that friendship not only with those of our own sex but with those of the opposite sex may more fully enable such vision, we have every reason to attempt it, despite its inherent difficulties.

We should not, therefore, underestimate the importance of the most obvious location for friendship between men and women: the bond of marriage. There are many differences between our world and that shared by Socrates and Critobulus. By no means least of them is the formative influence of Christian culture, with its exaltation of marriage as the highest of personal bonds. To be sure, precisely because the husband or wife as friend is not only "another self" but as fully "an-other" as we can experience, friendship in marriage cannot be presumed. If there is any truth in Lillian Rubin's analysis, each spouse may fear the otherness of the partner and the loss of self that intimacy requires. The man fears engulfment, "losing a part of himself that he's struggled to maintain over the years." The woman fears invasiveness that threatens the boundary she has struggled to maintain between her self and others. Each is tempted to avoid such otherness, to settle for a friend more like the self. But if we can overcome that temptation—in this case, perhaps, with the aid of eros—we may find a bond that truly helps us see beyond ourselves.

When Harry finally realizes that he loves Sally and wants to marry her, he ticks off the reasons: the way she's cold when it's 71 degrees outside; the way it takes her an hour-and-a-half to order a sandwich; the way she crinkles up her nose when she looks at him. All these might be only the signs of an infatuated lover looking at the beloved, not of a friend who stands beside the friend and looks outward. But last in Harry's litany of reasons is that Sally is "the last person I want to talk to before I go to bed at night." And J. B. Priestley—though worrying that spouses' lives may be "so intertwined, that they are almost beyond talk as we understand it"—has a view not unlike Harry's: "Talk demands that people should begin, as it were, at least at some distance from one another, that there should be some doors still to unlock. Marriage is partly the unlocking of those doors, and it sets out on its happiest and most prosperous voyages when it is launched on floods of talk."

In marriage, if we are patient and faithful, we may find that "balance and sanity" which friendship between men and women offers, and we may find it in a context where eros too may be fulfilled without becoming destructive. Against the view of Critobulus we may, therefore, set the wisdom of Ben Sira: "A friend or companion is always welcome, but better still to be husband and wife." FT

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Living at the Borders: Eastern Orthodoxy and World Disorder

Anthony Ugolnik

Five years ago, well before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the National Geographic Society had anticipated the reunification of Germany, and thus when the happy day came, it was ready for the onslaught of map revision that was shortly to follow. Prepared as the Society was then, however, it must now, like the rest of us, stagger under the weight of the challenge from Eastern Europe. Once-minute tasks, like revisions in place names, now require massive computerized shifts in orthography from Russian to Ukrainian to English. Most of us came to know world maps as sturdy planes of thick rag paper; now the computer has made it possible for nations to appear—or disappear—with the nibble of a computer mouse.

The real problem presented by the new face of Eastern Europe is not that our minds must adjust to new realities, but precisely that they must adjust to *old* ones. And these turn out to be the more terrifying. Among the archetypes that give shape to our fears, it is the specter of the ancient curse—the wizened mummy awakened in the tomb or the frozen cave dweller thawed from aeons of sleep—that induces the greatest terror.

Only now has America realized how comfy the Cold War had become. True, Ronald Reagan did recall from the deeps of liberal silence the names of "captive nations"; but Eastern Europe largely transcends American ethnic politics and hence has been of only glancing concern to American politicians. Moreover, "The Soviet Union" is a term infinitely more comfortable to pronounce than Kazakhstan or Ossetia or Nagorno-Karabakh. The Kazakhs, or Ossetians, or the embattled Armenians of Karabakh were there all along, of course. But in the old order, we could remain comfortably oblivious to their existence; if they suffered, the "news" knew it not.

Now that such peoples are rising up, they confront us with a real problem. They make demands. They engage in disputes with their neighbors and with us. Freed of their shackles, they sometimes kill one another, and in extremely nasty ways. Nor are they inclined to stop just because we—the people, after all, who had for so long consigned them to oblivion—tell them to. As for us, it begins to dawn upon us that these disorderly strangers might very well constitute a threat to the order of *our* world. A creeping war in Eastern Europe might one day even result in our sending our own boys (and girls) to die. Meanwhile we are horrified to watch the children of others dying in places whose names the National Geographic Society is now recasting.

As a result of all this, newly resurrected ethnicities, like walking mummies in a B-movie, have become a focus of our fears. For many newspaper columnists and former Sovietologists, who fed on the Old Order, these new peoples are as welcome as Godzilla in post-Hiroshima Japan. In his "chicken Kiev" speech of 1990, for example, President Bush

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recognized an embalmed Ukraine colorfully enshrined in museums of folklore with its beautiful Easter eggs and muscular dances. Yet he denied the country the status of a real nation when he warned it against "dangerous nationalisms"; the price Ukraine would be required to pay for the new world order, it seems, was a confinement to the bonds of the old. Once Ukraine declared its independence and established a free Ukraine as an incontrovertible fact, however, it must be said that President Bush adjusted to the new political reality—whereas academics, journalists, and Sovietologists have not. (Nor, we fear, may President Clinton. He tends to draw his advisors from the ranks of thinkers shaped, after all, by the old order.)

One journalist, Stephen Budiansky, a senior writer of *U.S. News & World Report*, wrote an article entitled "In the Healthy Grip of a Great National Idea." Budiansky contrasts Americans, who so wisely show themselves capable of self-mockery, with the Ukrainians, who are said to "nurse grudges" as they venerate heroes steeped in blood. Bogdan Khmelnytsky, the seventeenth-century Cossack who murdered Poles and Jews en masse as he liberated Ukraine from Polish domination, was one such hero.

I am an Orthodox priest, and have never been a "Sovietologist." My fields are theology and the symbolic imagination. But being a member of the Orthodox Church, I now find that I have willy-nilly become a part of the new demonology. For since the imagination of long-suppressed peoples clothes itself in both theology and symbol, such peoples' theology often comprises the essence of their politics—a fact that secular scholars have great difficulty in grasping. During the Cold War, we Orthodox were consigned to the dustbin of history, by the West as well as the East. I well remember the conditions under which Orthodox academics labored before the momentous year of 1989-90. I myself once sought a grant to study the relationship between religion and ethnic politics in the then USSR, and thus had an interview with a secular Sovietologist who controlled the purse-strings. This scholar, who had cheerfully funded such work as the unearthing of analogues to Western feminism in the USSR, said in turning me down, "Quite frankly, we fear you will pursue a religious agenda."

That much of Eastern Europe is now pursuing a religious agenda, notably devoid of Western feminism, no doubt now annoys my former referees. The fact is, religion—often in its Orthodox form—has become "hot," and most analysts seem to be remarkably incapable of dealing with it. Illiterate in theology and Orthodox thought, many analysts simply engage in recriminations. Barely disguising their contempt, they wonder at Ukrainians who can spend hours droning psalms in church while their economy is in a state of collapse, or, even more persistently, profess a horrified puzzlement at peoples, as in former Yugoslavia, who can rape and murder in the name of faith. Thus faith—and above all, a faith that identifies itself in any sense with the ethnic, cultural *particularity* of the people who profess it—has become discredited in our time.

Even the famously religious among us can fall into the same trap. Elie Weisel, on a journey to Sarajevo to negotiate at least some preliminary steps toward peace, met first with Bosnians. Then he met with Serbs. This veteran of horrors, this philosopher who has spent his life staring at the face of death and contemplating injustice, said in an offhand remark in French, captured by a news camera as he left a meeting, "How can one make peace with such people!" "Such people." That is what the reemergent nations have become. And the religious community in the West often approaches them with quite the same frame of mind as that of the secular powers.

We Orthodox in the West, so much affected by the new shifts in the world, are deployed in the space between polarities. Western ourselves, we are yet "of the East," at least in theological terms. It is a frustrating place to be. The academy in the West has of late grown quite intoxicated with its efforts at pluralism, struggling, that is, to understand traditions not "of itself." The problem is that the very act of understanding itself becomes a factor in our separation from the academic culture. For the truth is that the religious mind and the contemporary secular mind "understand" things quite differently.

In this postmodern era, deconstructionist analysis and an enshrined relativism make of every phenomenon but a ghostly apparition, dependent upon the interpreter for meaning. The interpreter, in turn, is dependent upon other interpreters. The only certainty in this plastic process is the critic, endowed with the empowering insight to realize that all meaning (except, of course, that which the critic discerns) is a chimera. Nothing could be more despotic than this "democracy of meaning," for in it the Western critic controls the process by which meaning itself is to be discerned. The apostles of "diversity" control the processes by which thought itself is to be judged as "valid." Thus Western secular intellectuals use the mind in much the same way as the Western news media use the camera: selectively, and with the conviction that the tool confers existence itself upon that on which it focuses.

Of course, well-meaning Western intellectuals seek to understand what is going on in Eastern Europe. The problem, as we said, is that they imagine that the peoples of the rest of the world share their own criteria. A few examples should suffice. "Ukrainian nationalism," so often cited in the West as a problem in the new world order, is defined in purely secular terms, American intellectuals being profoundly suspicious of any metaphysical or spiritual dimensions of "nationhood." The fact is, howev-

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er, that peoplehood in Eastern Europe was suppressed according to a secular agenda; the rediscovery there of such things as national identity, spirituality, and the possibility of transcendence takes place primarily through a repudiation of the old secular order. Thus the "misguided" Ukrainians and the "backward" Belorussians and, yes, the "fanatical" Serbs derive their rediscovered nationhood in large part from theological sources.

Not that we Orthodox, especially in the West, are comfortable with this new process. We had in fact grown quite comfortable with our old status as martyrs. It was with great pain and astonishment that some of us awoke to the realization that we ourselves could with such great rapidity become parties to repression. As recently as 1989 I myself published a book, *The Illuminating Icon*, based on the assumption that Orthodoxy would remain oppressed for a long time, and treating the Russian religious mind to the kind of liberal analysis that seems to flow naturally from such an idea. Now, a bare four years later, my friends in Moscow estimate that at least 20 percent of the Orthodox clergy have sympathies they would have to classify as "fascist." I also went to Russia, as a deacon, assuming that Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe could survive only in the frame of a kind of "pan-Slavic" Russian Orthodox Church. My experience there, in both a seminary and a parish, carried me, much to my own surprise, into the priesthood of the Ukrainian Church. For anyone who wades even ankle deep in the spirituality of Eastern Europe, it turns out that nationalist allegiances cannot be overcome. After the death of the old order, the process of "becoming" involves commitment to a new kind of vision of who one wants to be. What the West defines as "nationalism" has there become the necessary birth pangs of a new order.

We theologically committed believers in the West can understand this process only if we look honestly at what has become of us in America. The canon of self-discovery pervades America's spiritual landscape, with sexuality very often the key to commitment. The shelves of the country's bookstores are packed with weighty analyses of such phenomena as cross-dressing and transsexuality as metaphors for the postmodern mind. The very enlightened Westerners who regard the nationalist, sectarian conflicts of the new order as reprehensible, then, are at the same time prepared to endorse an ecclesial community based on homosexuality or even the proclivity to wear the undergarments of the opposite sex. Economics can lie at the heart of a Western vision of sin, and a good theologian can anathematize the idea that the poor should submit to their poverty. Yet at the same time the aspiration to nationhood of a specific people is held to be a dangerous idea, an idea to be suppressed in the name of humility. Clearly, there are certain deep divisions in our ideas of what should constitute genuine community.

Now, it seems to need saying that Orthodox people in America share their fellow Americans' dismay at the slaughter in Bosnia, at the religious hostilities between the Orthodox and the Catholics in Ukraine, and at the threatened resurgence of anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe. And while it is certainly true that Western journalists and intellectuals have always been quick to judge that about which they know little or nothing, it is also true that our dismay is not enough. We Orthodox are not speaking out as we and only we should. Our publicly expressed shock at the offenses "on both sides" in Bosnia is insufficient. We are not entitled to say, even among ourselves, that our feelings should be tempered by the fact that those who are outraged at atrocities against the Bosnian Muslims were once silent at the slaughter of Serbs, or that those who condemn religious riots in Ukraine once denied the holocaust of mass starvation in that nation, or that we Orthodox have been made the scapegoats for world anti-Semitism. It is for the others to bear the weight of their offense against us: our business as Orthodox is to condemn our own, whenever our own deserve condemnation, and to join with others in the enterprise of peacemaking.

Our critics are right, then, to call us Orthodox to task for our silence. At the same time, however, they too become a party to our offenses when they fail to publicize and empower the few brave voices among us. Patriarch Paul of Serbia, a firmly traditionalist Orthodox hierarch, has spoken frequently and with great spiritual discernment of the hostilities in the Balkans. Greeted by thin and treacly American media attention, he has visited the United States for assistance in his appeals for peace. In Europe, he has joined with Catholic and Muslim leaders in making concrete proposals to stop the slaughter.

Robert Pianka, a Catholic managing Orthodox relief efforts in Belgrade, sees Patriarch Paul as the victim of tragic neglect in the West: "The only real institutional survivor in Serbia is the Church," says Pianka. "The State could not digest it. And the only moral voice in Serbia which cannot be silenced belongs to Patriarch Paul. The West needs to hear him." Heroically counterposed to the former *apparatchiks* who manage the "kleptocracy" of modern Serbia and profiteer from the war, the Patriarch is a moral giant among his own people. The Patriarch, however, is an "Old Calendar" traditionalist even by Orthodox standards; he does not attract that wand of visibility which American commentators reserve for the lights of religious liberalism. The American media ignore Patriarch Paul and inadvertently legitimize, with their cameras and wire reports, the den of thieves in the Serbian political arena. Thus Serbs feel that the Americans, yet again, blind themselves to the moral particularity of the Orthodox East. Most Orthodox Americans, well aware that America spends little sympathy on the Orthodox, respond

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with a defensive silence.

We Orthodox are surely permitted to ask that someone show concern when we, too, are persecuted. But that is no excuse for silence now. The fact is, our way of understanding ecclesiality, our mode of perceiving community, is the source of our greatest God-begotten belonging. It is also the case that a misunderstanding of ecclesiality and the nature of "church" can also be the source of our greatest estrangement from God. Today a conviction of who is "us" and who is "them" again leads us into a black hole of hatred of the Other. Unless we act now, when the clouds of war again gather in Europe, we can be sucked up into a vortex of hate, into communion with the Evil One.

Historically, Eastern Orthodoxy has conceived of ecclesiality, of *eklesia* itself, as being to some degree a function of ethnicity and nationhood. To be sure, Orthodoxy has used the term "phyletism" to describe the virtual equation of church with ethnicity and has condemned phyletism as heresy. Yet at the same time, Orthodox thinkers regard the separation of "church" and "culture" as a false separation, or at least a separation impossible to achieve in the life of a believer. Insofar as "nation" is an expression of language and culture, then, faith is an inseparable part of national and ethnic identity.

Orthodoxy takes very seriously that quality we call "holiness," both as it applies to God and to all that partakes in God's creation. And sanctity itself is often expressed through the medium of nationhood. As a sample, we may look to Metropolitan Ilarion (Ohienko) (1882-1972), a Ukrainian Orthodox bishop and intellectual who headed the Ukrainian Church in Canada. "The choir of saints from each nation," he said, "serves as the strongest spiritual foundation of that nation, and a strong spiritual foundation guarantees a strong nation." As one might expect from one whose nation is embattled, the Metropolitan wrote in defensive terms: "Blessed is the fate of the nation which knows its holy intercessors well and calls upon them for defense of land and people." The tradition of the *podvig*, the ascetic internal warfare against the basest elements of the Self, becomes externalized. The *podvig* is a collective struggle for "holy nationhood," separate from all other nations. The independent, "autocephalous" church is a prototype for the independent nation: "Our Ukrainian Orthodox Church is an autocephalous (independent) church. This autocephaly is sustained by our choir of saints. We must assiduously and properly compile the lives of our saints in written form, which will continue such sustenance."

The Metropolitan wrote these words a generation ago in arguing for an independent Ukrainian Church. Other Orthodox have been painfully slow to recognize the Ukrainian Church, just as they were in the past about acknowledging other autocephalous Orthodox churches. Yet that is a part of the acknowledged Orthodox process: the recognition of the church arises in concert with the acknowledgement of the nation and the language from which it springs. In public ceremony, the celebration of "all saints" of the newly emergent nations has accompanied their reemergence into the political arena. Metropolitan Ilarion acknowledged the power of narrative, the life of the tale, when he urged that the lives of national saints be preserved and celebrated. Ukrainian believers—like Serbian believers, Russian believers, Romanians, Georgians, Greeks and others of Orthodox tradition—see their nationhood, ever renascent after oppression, as a function of their ecclesiality.

Love is a belonging that transcends the Self. Not surprisingly, then, the national church "reverberates," all its members participating as they do in the common life of nationhood. Like the utopian vision of Marxism, the spiritual identity of state and church inspires. Unlike the Marxist consciousness, however, Orthodoxy extends its domain beyond the grave. In that sense, the people of God as embodied in a believing *ethnos* or nation take on a collective persona capable of sacrifice, martyrdom, sanctification, and resurrection. The political theory of Byzantium, which envisioned church and state acting in synergistic harmony through time, continues to exert an attraction in Eastern Europe. Even in the eyes of the revered western Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemann, it was this Byzantine vision that determined the Orthodox idea of "Christendom."

Father Schmemann was Orthodox, and he was also a profoundly modern Christian thinker. Unlike many Orthodox in Eastern Europe, he recognized that "Christendom" as a political, juridical concept was dead. Even so, the idea of Byzantium exerted a pull upon him and his influential scholar-colleague at St. Vladimir's, Father John Meyendorff. Father Meyendorff was the seminal Orthodox Byzantinist of the century; and Father Schmemann, in his lectures and writings, conferred a nobility upon Byzantium even as he certified its demise, calling it the "grand but failed experiment."

Father Schmemann, did not, however, survive to see the renascence of the idea of Byzantium struggling once again to be reborn at the very funeral of Communism. Thus he had no way of knowing that for some the experiment was not over. It survives still, at least in the hopes of many modern Orthodox. KGB files tell the story of which Christians collaborated with the Marxist authorities: they cannot fully reveal the motives of the collaborators. Some, of course, sought wealth or escape from punishment. But some, I am convinced, truly sought to serve the "national Church," temporarily encased in a cocoon of Soviet repression. They saw collaboration as the price of survival.

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The apparatus of the modern Eastern European state is just now taking shape. Most of the new nations, for example, as yet have no real constitution. There is, however, a kind of timeless synergy between the civil authorities and the church. Yeltsin appears, prominently, with the Russian Orthodox Patriarch, Aleksei II. Aleksei, who served in Soviet times as the very model of an urbane and compliant hierarch, apologizes for his former lapses in courage: in an interview with me in 1990, as Metropolitan of St. Petersburg (then Leningrad), he carefully explained that through cooperation with the authorities he was able to gain valuable concessions for the Church. Leonid Kravchuk, president of Ukraine, angles to preserve, promote, and protect his own preferred hierarch, Metropolitan Philaret of Kiev. Just as Kravchuk was once a Communist and is now a nationalist, his friend Philaret, too, has undergone a metamorphosis. He was an openly compliant "Russian" Orthodox bishop in Ukraine, was then deposed by the Russian synod, and has now become a champion of a new independent Ukrainian Church.

Such compromises, great and small, have become the focus of much criticism of the Orthodox—and not only in the West. The Ukrainian Catholics are a living repudiation of the Orthodox rationale for cooperating with their Communist masters, namely that it ensured the survival of the Church. The Orthodox have yet to acknowledge, in fact, that stoic resistance to the oppressive Soviet regime in Ukraine won the Ukrainian Catholics (whose liturgy and structure, by the way, is virtually indistinguishable from the Orthodox) a new and vibrant credibility. Cardinal Lubachivsky of Lviv, restored to the Ukrainian Catholic cathedral of St. George in that city, took pride, he told me during a conversation in 1991, in his church's enduring strategy of resistance, dating from the time of its fierce persecution in western Ukraine after World War II, when Stalin annexed the area to the Soviet Union. In the mind of the Cardinal, loyalty to the Church was equivalent to, a paradigm for, loyalty to Ukraine. The Orthodox now find it difficult to acknowledge the truth that many Orthodox who did not suffer imprisonment, indeed, who relied upon the more compliant Orthodox Church for their sacraments and spiritual nurturing, later became Ukrainian Catholics—in recognition of the witness they themselves had been unwilling or unable to bear.

The whole problem of political compromise, however, can distract from the central problem, and as it happens, the Ukrainian Catholics nowadays face the very problems once endured by the Orthodox. In dealing with the apparatus of the modern state, they, too, must make compromises, and these in turn cause division in their ranks. In other words, the dilemma that has become virtually coextensive with Orthodox reality is no longer unique to the Orthodox. Insofar as a specific Orthodox church is connected to a new sense of nationhood, its modern identity is as yet unclear. The state of the Church in Eastern Europe recalls those chilling lines from Randall Jarrell's wartime poem, "From my mother's sleep I fell into the State, / and I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze." For two and three generations, most of the Orthodox in Eastern Europe have survived in the icy incubation of the Marxist state. Their role and identity are unclear, often even to themselves. Anyone familiar with the daily reality of believers under the old order, as well as their painful transition into the new, knows the price of a thousand compromises and indignities etched into the soul.

Having been granted the confidence of many a wizened Russian believer along with many a newly baptized one, I am certain that their crises are similar to those of believers in the other Eastern European countries. They identify the Church with a kind of purity at the center of the nation they cherish, yet they are simultaneously unsure as to what, precisely, constitutes that nation. And as we observe in both personal and international relationships, an unclear sense of self can be dangerous. One who is unsure of himself often relies for a sense of identity upon a hatred of the other. The Gospel itself approaches the "threatening other" with a sense of play and paradox: if we are to "love our enemies" and "do good to those who persecute us," then our love has transformed the very category of enemy. In so doing, of course, it has also expanded the borders of the self.

But there is one clear problem with national churches. Love may have no limits in Christ, but nations clearly have borders. What is more, they fight and kill to protect and extend them.

For the Ukrainian Orthodox Church the dilemma is embodied in the very name of Ukraine. In Slavonic etymology, Ukraine is *u-kraine*, "at the border." Ukrainians are a people, whether in their majority Orthodox or minority Catholic incarnations, who have perpetually lived "at the borders"—in that creative realm which the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin called the *mezhdumir*, the "between world." Some contemporary analysts, refugees from the old Sovietology, carp that Ukraine is a mere "construct" (as if any nation were not a "construct"), a modern creation. But the *mezhdumir*, that space at the outer reaches where Slav meets non-Slav, where the Self meets the Other, is its very environment. There has, in other words, been a Ukraine as long as there has been a border: Ukraine is a function of Slavic identity itself.

Most of the new nations in Eastern Europe are weary of being defined by others. Surely, this should not be difficult for a Western thinker to understand. Look at the a fortiori example of the battle for definition being waged on the American campus and on the shelves of American bookstores. Feminist

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writers, in their quest to speak on behalf of all women, strain to define themselves against the male "other," who in their minds has heretofore been the custodian of the category of femininity. Similarly, homosexuals no longer wish to be defined by heterosexuals as practitioners of a "behavior"; they wish to define themselves as an identity, a veritable metaphysical state of which the behavior is a mere symbol. African-Americans, since they do actually constitute a people, come closest among Americans to sharing some characteristics of the quest of the new Eastern European nations. They have labored down through the generations to define who they are, and in successive waves of self-styled identity have moved from "Negro" to "Black" to "African-American," all in a quest to claim a separate and defined "self." The difficulty for so many of us, then, lies first in discovering who we are and then finding some way to interact with those who have for a long time been doing us injury in their identification of us.

Orthodox churchgoers would by and large insist that Orthodoxy, in the perfection of its ecclesiality, embeds within itself the kind of transcendent love that promotes perfect community. Alexei Khomyakov (1804-1860) developed the notion of *sobornost*, that perfect community within which all national, ethnically defined churches engaged each other in a community of love. In Khomyakov's systematics, faith is in its very nature something not to be found in the single believing individual, but rather something experienced in the community of those who share it.

> Faith is always the consequence of revelation recognized as a revelation; it is the perceiving of an invisible fact manifested in some visible fact; faith is not *belief* or logical conviction based on conclusions, but much more. It is not the act of one perceptive faculty separated from all others, but the act of all the powers of reason grasped and captivated in all its depth by the living truth of the revealed fact. Faith is not known or sensed only, but it is known and sensed together, so to speak; in a word, it is not knowledge alone, but knowledge and life.

"Faith is not known or sensed only, but it is known or sensed together." This principle held great promise in a divided century. Khomyakov wrote these words as an antidote to what he saw as the imperiousness of the Roman see. The principle itself, however, was often applied by Khomyakov's admirers in an also imperious Russocentric national context: the sharing of common culture was thus seen (and is seen still) as the mark of a theological perception.

Khomyakov's principle, derived from Orthodox Patristic sources, is laced with ironies. His expression of universality was written precisely in reaction against the West, identifying an explicit rejection of "the Western" as a mark of the holy. This attack against "partitive thought" has served to this day as an intellectual tool for numerous Orthodox thinkers who in defining themselves have leaned heavily on their distinction from the West. On the other hand, this apology from Khomyakov, the archetypal Slavophile, was first written in French. Not until four years after his death in 1860 was it published in Russian. Indeed, one could argue that Khomyakov's articulation of Orthodoxy depended for its very formulation on a Western intellectual context. Finally, Khomyakov was a Russian, writing in an era of profound Russification. To this day, for example, the Orthodox community has not fully extended *sobornost* to a manifestly Ukrainian Church independent of Moscow. Orthodoxy is caught in a modern paradox. Identified even by its confessors through its Eastern and Byzantine antecedents, it professes the universality of the Gospel. Unwittingly, Khomyakov put into the minds of those who responded to the universality of his vision a powerful weapon for divisiveness.

The Orthodox, then, have theorized eloquently about the harmonic structure of the Church, in which all local churches participate in one loving communion. This idea well expresses our ecclesiology; but there is from a practical point of view one apparent flaw in that ecclesiology: it bespeaks perfection. An adherent of Orthodoxy can envision a world within which a family of "nationally" incarnate Orthodox churches engage in Christian *agape*, negotiating all problems in a context of harmony. In reality, of course, conflicts abound and hatreds fester. And if hatred festers even among co-religionists of different national origin, what is there to say of those situations where the conflict is with peoples of other "churches" alien in theology, tradition, and culture?

This is not, of course, an Orthodox problem alone. But it does become uniquely ours when in asserting the theological perfection expressed through the Church, we so often ignore or deny the evil done by its custodians. It is consonant with the very nature of man that at one and the same time Serbs can be both oppressors and victims. Our particular Orthodox dilemma, however, is that we are more easily used by nationalist zealots than those who belong to other traditions. We carry within our very doctrine all the possible structures and strategies of denial. As church, we express the perfection of divine communion, whereas it is after all as members of a specific ethnic, national group that we come to see ourselves as partaking in that perfection. I am Orthodox, and I embrace my church with all my soul and commitment. But I have also observed how Orthodoxy has been attractive to tyrants, whether they believe in it or not. We are all too easily used. At times we are even eager to be used, seeing in that use the vehicle for our survival.

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This is a time of profound crisis for the mind of the Church, for despite the Gospel they share, Catholics and Orthodox in East Europe often spit hatred at each other. In the Balkans Orthodox, Catholic, and Muslim are drenched in each other's blood. There are times when we exhaust language and imagery, and I believe that in this dilemma of mutual slaughter our theological language has been exhausted. Why do we kill each other so brutally? Surely, it is not because we compete for the same God: for God has forbidden us the illusion that we can manipulate Him like so much conquered territory.

The answer lies not in our territory, but in the tales we tell. We destroy each other because we occupy the same space, like rats trapped together, gnawing at one another for room to live. Nor, in truth, is it actual physical space for which we compete. Bosnians and Serbs who lived on the same block a year ago kill each other today; Ukrainian Catholics and Ukrainian Orthodox who worshipped together but a few years ago now cannot bury each other in the same ground. Rather, we compete for *narrative* space. We try to live in the same story, the same history, the same tale. And we cannot in our story bear the presence of the stranger.

In our Orthodox tale, we are heroes. Most often we do not even win. We are heroic, rather, in our messianic self-annihilation. Serbs together absorbed the flood of Muslim aggression: without them, their tales tell us, all of Europe would have been Islamicized in an Ottoman flood come crashing down the Danube. Russians, alone, bore the brunt of the Fascist (or Tartar-Mongol, or Teutonic Knightly) storm. Without their twenty million dead, says the Russian story, an aged Hitler might yet reign over his eternal Reich. Ukrainians starved while the world stood heedless. Without their sacrifice and nurtured dreams (and tales and dances and art), the new Soviet man might still drip his sweat over the steppes, with his hammer in one hand and sickle in another.

The century, as Elie Weisel stated, may begin and end in Sarajevo. Whatever else, it is hardly a century in which Orthodoxy has been triumphant. Our Orthodox heroism, in fact, is built on the bones of our martyrs. At our worst, however, we delude ourselves with the illusion that Christian martyrdom is compatible with revenge.

That delusion is a part of the disease of our century, bred in the dogma of "victimization." Evil people might be able to kill out of a sheer, mad orgasmic energy in slaughter. But people who think themselves "good" can kill only when they ardently believe that they too have been victims. Serbian soldiers committed rape, fed upon stories of raped Serbian females. Armenians killed, bolstered by graphic photos of the slaughter of their children. The Orthodox of the newly resurrected nations are bearers of the heroic tale of survival. Theirs is an epic voice, and their vulnerability to evil comes to the fore when their epic drowns out the Gospel.

The epic voice is, as Mikhail Bakhtin notes, quite different from the more dialogic voice of modernity. In an epic, we hardly have individual characters whose words, laced with ambiguities, cast doubt over meaning and motive. Beowulf does not engage in wordplay with Grendel: in a hand-wrestle against his demon-foe, "sinew snaps, gristle grinds." An arm, torn whole from its socket, is Beowulf's bloody trophy. The epic voice declares; its utterance is uncompromising. When two heroes occupy the same narrative space, they engage in a trick called "flyting." Flyting is still alive and well in modern rap music: in flyting, foes insult each other; they goad each other on to conflict. Its voice runs through rival street gangs struggling for symbols, like the brand of a tennis shoe or the color of a baseball cap. It is the same voice as is heard over the lines of fire in Bosnia or Kosovo.

The Western intellectual has failed to acknowledge, I think, the power of the epic voice. Males are said, in feminist critiques, to employ it as a part of their oppressive, hierarchical pattern. But in truth the epic voice is hardly confined to one gender: the most radical of feminists, in fact, engage in some hefty "flyting" of their own. Gender or culture wars, however fierce, have not yet engaged the arms merchants. But in the epic consciousness of Eastern Europe the heroic agents have in their destructive capacities surpassed Beowulf and Igor and Sviatopolk of old. They have Uzis and M-16s instead of swords. And if (God forbid) we fall deep enough into the void, they have nuclear weapons as well.

One way to deal with this competition for "narrative space" is to make of the Gospel itself an epic, an epic in which all believers share. Resurrected nations resurrect their old and sacred heroes; and Christ, the Mother of God, and the saints can participate in the epic consciousness. In Orthodox hymnography, the epic voice flourishes. It was once strong in the West as well. The epithets applied to Christ in the Saxon Gospel *Heliand* describe him as a Conquering King: "The Guardian of the Land, the Chieftain of Mankind, fasted for forty nights eating no meat." The disciples, too, share in the epic heroism: "Then the warrior companions whom He chose from among the people gathered around Christ, the Ruler and Rescuer." In modern Catholicism, the liturgical year retains some distinct epic features in the feasts of Christ the King and the devotion to Mary, Queen of Heaven.

On the whole, however, Western Christians have suppressed the Warrior King. Though He is rampant in popular places, such as the pages of C. S. Lewis' fiction, he has been purged from the imagination of most mainstream seminaries. Revisionists, in fact, have accompanied "inclusive language" with censor-

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ship as they subject traditional hymns to a kind of arms control: "Christian soldiers" seldom march any more, at least in mainstream churches. Orthodoxy, however, takes on the blessings and problems of this kind of imagery. In its hymns and rituals, these epic attributes resound and swell and stir the imaginative spirit.

Let us take, for one example, the "Hymn to the Champion Ruler," a song sung to the Mother of God. This is an early hymn, by tradition assigned to the medieval Romanos the Melodist. It forms the center of a powerful Orthodox archetype contained within the following legend. In the ninth century, Constantinople was besieged by hostile tribes. The army had vacated the city to fight on another front. The people, under the leadership of their bishop, marched in procession with a beloved icon of Mary around the walls of the city as they sang:

To You the Champion Leader (ipermaxos stratygos)
Do I, thy city, make thank offerings of victory.
For You, O Mother of God, have delivered me from terrors;
But just as You have Invincible Power,
Do free me from every kind of danger
So that I may cry to You:
Hail O Bride Unwedded.

The hymn gives Mary the formal title of victorious general, a leader of armies: "*ipermaxos stratygos.*" This is a common refrain in the Orthodox tradition. Endowed with the title "Unashamed Protector of Christians," Mary is invoked by Orthodox peoples in times when the existence of one or another of them *as* a people is threatened. Her icon, in fact, often appears in Orthodox imagery as a defensive—or even an offensive—power against hostile armies.

The epic voice also contains an identification of the self with the collective. The epic hero speaks on behalf of the people whom he leads or defends. Note in the hymn above that the voice of the hymn speaks in the first person, as "I." Yet that first person, that hymning subject, is an entire city. While the modern, dialogic voice of humankind is fragmented into a mosaic of "individuals," the epic voice promotes a single will, a single purpose, defining itself against those who threaten it.

As we know, this epic voice can sometimes urge the collective body to burst forth in slaughter—to avert threats, or to free the Promised Land. Igor and Roland, Beowulf and Joshua had no moral qualms about "ethnic cleansing." Yet it is certainly not true that such is the inevitable product of the epic Christian consciousness. The Orthodox mind can also spiritualize the battle and focus it on a conquest of the self. As Patriarch Paul of Serbia urges all sides in the Balkan conflict, "Each of us must now act as if we look directly upon the face of God." The monastic *podvig*, which is conveyed in Orthodox spirituality to every believer, involves an epic internal battle against evil. To be sure, such a battle can become externalized and corrupted. (The Western Crusades, after all, provided the Orthodox with a rather unpleasant model of ecumenism. Yet such use of faith as a battle cry has been condemned by Orthodox and Catholic leaders together.) It is the unleashing of the darker forces of faith that we are now observing in Eastern Europe. Yet we cannot suppress the violence by suppressing our distinctive "voice of prayer."

The epic inward battle waged against sin and all that is not of God is in truth the most aggressive and offensive of wars. Its goal is the eradication of the "old person" and the transformation of the believer, even in his or her very body, through the process of *theosis* or "growth unto God." And it is here, at bottom, that the solution to this terrible problem lies. For if the Trinity is our model, we must acknowledge in Trinitarian doctrine the real God-begotten source of all human community. We need, that is, to reclaim the life-giving community that lies in the Trinitarian vision.

Each integral Person of the Godhead, *as* Person, gives of its "Godself" to each other Person in a *movement*, an eternal "processing" of Love. That is our model—a voice for us in this fallen world that places each of us, struggling, at the borders of every other "self." In our Western culture, too, we need to be saved from ourselves. Gender, for example, is no call to sexual conflict—just as peoplehood is no call to warfare—but rather a charism calling us to engage the "borders" of another being, "other" in gender, in the sacrament of God-blessed sexuality. We struggle for sympathy, we struggle for understanding, and we must acknowledge that we struggle as well for a recognition of our identity from every other being.

Each of us is, then, metaphysically *u-kraine*, "at the borders" of every other person with whom we seek to enter into communion. Each of us is, in that etymological sense, "Ukrainian," endowed with the same struggle of assertion and becoming as are the reawakening nations of Eastern Europe. The struggle has dangers. There are those in this fallen world who seek to consume, "gobble up," in effect, all those with whom they share some facet of their history. For such among us, there is no "*u-kraine*," for if we seek to absorb and appropriate the Other we respect no "borders" to our being. The conquering neighbor, like an abusive spouse, respects no limits to identity and personhood.

Nations that emerge from repression have a right to their own particular being: no critic, or president, should have the temerity to expect them to suppress themselves once more. By the same token, however, no nation, Orthodox in tradition or not, should employ the "epic voice" for the annihilation or banishment of the stranger in its midst. To use it so is to

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deny the very premise of Trinitarian life. "Ethnic cleansing" is incompatible with the Orthodox vision of *synousia*, "co-being" with God and with each other. As Orthodox, we must not refrain from declaring these two principles concurrently: the right to common life as a people, and the command to respect the "borders" of another person's being.

From my own experience in the Kievan Study dialogues, an ongoing engagement between Eastern Catholics and Orthodox under the Ecumenical Patriarchate, there is one premise for loving dialogue that neither side can ignore. We must beg forgiveness for past offenses, each of the other. Paul reminds us, in Philippians, of a command that is directly counter to the wisdom of any age: "Let each of you look, not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Phil. 2:4) This counsel promotes not only charity, but also survival—survival of the person, the church, even of the nation. In valuing and pursuing our identity, once more it is vital to look "to the borders"—*u-kraine*—to that place where the collective "Self" meets the collective "Other."

Among those willing to renounce the exclusive title to victimization, there is reason for hope even in the Balkans. Alex Rondos, an Orthodox Christian who once worked with Catholic Relief Services, now directs International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) in Eastern Europe. IOCC, for the first time, is capable of coordinating often competing Orthodox jurisdictions in a coherent, professional relief effort. Throughout Eastern Europe, Orthodox institutions, unlike the corrupt residues of a failed Marxism, prove most capable of delivering aid efficiently. And in Belgrade, IOCC representative Robert Pianka, who shares his Catholic tradition with the Croats, is able to direct Orthodox aid to reach Muslims under Serbian control. "What all communities of victims need," he says, "is to recognize that they are bound to all others in a community that transcends victimization."

As Christians, then, we must renounce the "cult of the victim" that currently spreads not only through Eastern Europe, but constitutes one of the fundamental bases of the contemporary American epistemology of justice. The victim, even *as* victim, is capable of sin. If a community of victims comes to rehearse its own heroic epic removed from the transforming narrative of the Gospel, it will cry out for vengeance and thereby become a community of oppressors. A text, whether a "diversity" curriculum or a national epic, whether traditional or "liberationist" in genesis, once it is removed from the Gospel becomes a celebration of separation and division and hate. Ethnic cleansing, after all, has its intellectual counterpart in the rhetoric of the "genderist heresies" now besieging the Church as strongly as Arianism or Nestorianism ever did in the past.

There is but one answer to the victim: the cross. This is why, fretted with gold and beset with jewels, the cross has become for us the victorious emblem of our own heroic tale. It flashes forth in triumph only when we can see, beneath the gold, the blood of our own great Hero, the Hero whose sword is the act of forgiveness.

Forgiveness begins with an acknowledgement of guilt. It is pointless for us Ukrainian Orthodox to engage Ukrainian Catholics, for example, without acknowledging the injustice we did them when we collaborated with their Communist persecutors. The same applies to Croats and Serbs, to Germans and Jews. The very quest to forgive is liberating, for therein we respect not only those who may have violated our personhood, but also our own integrity as persons. Ultimately, hatred consumes all—love, self-respect, even the borders of our very identity. This is what the Gospel gives us in our own age. In this era we all dwell *u-kraine*, "at the borders," where, in meeting the Other, peoples as well as individuals find their only true identity. FT

Music of the Spheres

In the beginning there was no beginning;
no no; no was; no in; no there—
nothing that was, was, and all that wasn't,
inconceivable, and there was no one
and nothing, and anything, to care:
until such time—in due course—creation had begun

So Mozart ages hence could write his *Requiem*.

James Andrew Miller

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To Read and to Live

Alan Jacobs

In 1956, W. H. Auden returned to an Oxford University from which he had graduated almost thirty years earlier. He was now the University's Professor of Poetry, and in his Inaugural Lecture he spoke of an old concern of his—one that he had addressed in very different terms in 1939. In that distant age, in his famous elegy on Yeats, he had asserted that

> *Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry.*
> *Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still.*
> *For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives*
> *In the valley of its making where executives*
> *Would never want to tamper.*

Is it good or bad that "poetry makes nothing happen"? Though it may be regrettable that Yeats' poetry could not change Ireland, Auden's sneer at "executives" suggests that poetry's disconnection from things that happen can be a mark of distinction, a badge of honor. But by the time he got back to Oxford Auden had stopped sneering and had become rather mournful about the uselessness of poetry—though that mournfulness could often be masked by humor. At the beginning of his Inaugural Lecture he said,

> I should be feeling less uneasy at this moment than I do, if the duties of the Professor of Poetry were to produce, as occasion should demand, an epithalamium for the nuptials of a Reader in Romance Languages, an elegy on a deceased Canon of Christ Church, a May-day Masque for Somerville [College], or an election ballad for his successor.

Most of Auden's listeners no doubt thought he was joking, but he wasn't. By this point in his career Auden had so thoroughly repudiated the splendid isolation of poetry advocated by Romantic and modern writers alike that he had developed a genuine longing for a conception of the writer as a public servant or as an artisan: the fabricator of objects not only for pleasure but also for use.

We should note that Auden's argument with the Romantic tradition is not the same as that of his modernist predecessors like T. S. Eliot and James Joyce. Whereas those writers chastised Romanticism for its relentless celebration of the self, its "cult of personality," Auden frowns upon both Romantic *and* modern poetics for their acceptance of the autonomy of the literary imagination: for him such autonomy may more accurately be described as an enervating and ultimately deadly detachment. In the 1930s another writer, the Franco-Polish poet Oscar Milosz (older cousin of the Nobel Prize winner Czeslaw Milosz), described this isolating and aestheticizing tendency as an "unfortunate deviation" in the long history of poetry, which has "produced a schism and a misunderstanding between the poet and the great human family which has continued to the present."

Once such a diagnosis has been made, the next question is, how may this "schism" be healed, the family restored to wholeness? What can bring the prodigal poets back into the fold? Such a task is not, we must recognize, only a matter of encouraging writers to renew their ties with their society; it also involves getting readers to unlearn the lessons of literary autonomy which they have learned better perhaps than the writers themselves. Oscar Milosz argues that such a restoration can occur only through the arrival on the scene of a great author, "a modern Homer, Shakespeare, or Dante" who will renounce "his paltry ego" and reestablish a viable connection with the people. But even a possibility as remote as that is beyond Auden's imagination:

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> The so-called fine arts have lost the social utility they once had. Since the invention of printing and the spread of literacy, verse no longer has a utility value as a mnemonic, a device by which knowledge and culture were handed on from one generation to the next, and, since the invention of the camera, the draughtsman and the painter are no longer needed to provide visual documentation; they have, consequently, become "pure" arts, that is, gratuitous activities. . . . In the purely gratuitous arts . . . our century has no need, I believe, to be ashamed of its achievements, and in its production of purely utile and functional articles . . . it surpasses every previous age. But whenever it attempts to combine the gratuitous and the utile, to fabricate something which shall be both functional and beautiful, it fails utterly.

Thus Auden has a diagnosis but no prescription for cure: he cannot envision any changes in our world that would restore the arts to the usefulness he believes they once had.

People who nowadays teach and write about literature for a living seem to be prone to the same kind of uneasiness that afflicted Auden and Milosz. The doctrines of literary autonomy have had consequences not only for writers and readers, but also for teachers and students. The current ideological ferment in literary studies—the heated arguments about the political effects of literature and literary study, the increasing skepticism about the validity of purely aesthetic categories, and so on—has been generated by the same social and cultural forces that caused Auden's nostalgia for a poetic World That Time Forgot. But the arguments prompted by this admirable desire to reconnect the teaching, as well as the writing, of literature with "the great human family" have so far been fruitless, dominated by rhetorical posturing, name-calling, claiming of the moral high ground, and other tactics that contribute little to the potential resolution of the debate, or even to mutual comprehension by the antagonists. This fruitlessness, moreover, is inevitable—if for no other reason, because the vocabulary is so shallow and inflexible, and thus in need of replacement, or at least supplementation, by a language that is better able to account for what literature says to us and how we receive it. In short, we have been talking too much about politics and far too little about ethics.

First of all, using the study of literature as a means for altering the political landscape involves no small amount of hubris. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., now of Harvard University—editor of the forthcoming *Norton Anthology of Afro-American Literature* and a leading critic of the traditional literary canon—has stated the problem as well as any opponent might do:

> The recent turn towards politics and history in literary studies has turned the analysis of texts into a marionette theater of the political, to which we bring all the passions of our real-world commitments. And that's why it is sometimes necessary to remind ourselves of the distance from the classroom to the streets. Academic critics write essays, "readings" of literature, where the bad guys (you know, racism or patriarchy) lose, where the forces of oppression are subverted by the boundless powers of irony and allegory that no prison can contain, and we glow with hard-won triumph. We pay homage to the marginalized and the demonized, and it feels almost as if we've righted an actual injustice.

In other words, a Marxist or feminist "reading" of a literary work is still just a reading: it may be prompted by some political cause or some righteous doctrine, but in the end it tends to be only academic business as usual.

Nor is this state of affairs new. Most newly hatched literary theories are proclaimed by their proponents to be—and at the same time are decried by their opponents for being—"revolutionary," but the typical college classroom bears none of the battle scars conjured by the vocabulary of revolution. The most recent case of this kind was deconstruction, whose first appearance was either hailed or bewailed as a sign of the eschaton. But it didn't work out that way. Terry Eagleton, a British Marxist critic, skewered deconstruction's radical pretensions by noting that "there is little admirable in an authority . . . which can savour the delights of textual agnosticism precisely because it is institutionally secure, and perhaps likely to reinforce that security the more flamboyantly it parades its blindness. Others may not know, but to know that nobody knows is the most privileged knowledge conceivable, well worth trading for a handful of critical certainties." Thus, Eagleton concludes, "Deconstruction is able to outflank every existing knowledge to absolutely no effect. . . . It cancels all the way through and leaves everything just as it was." Now, the politically committed professor does everything he can to avoid this ethereal irrelevance—after all, as Marx said and as modern academics seem never to tire of repeating, the point is not to understand the world but to change it. But if Gates is right, then the work of the political ideologues misses that point in very much the same way as the deconstructionists do.

This is not only because a reading is just a reading, and a classroom just a classroom—as opposed to the "real world," or as Gates would have it, "the streets." Much political criticism, proclaiming itself to be the living repudiation of formal or structural analyses of texts, in fact mimics such formalism exactly. For despite its often formidable deployment of social and

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historical knowledge, political criticism tends to put that knowledge in the service of a dominant binary opposition, that between Oppressor and Oppressed, and then seeks to show what side a given text takes. In this way it resembles both Russian formalism and French structuralism, which sought to identify the component parts of a text (usually seeking matching pairs: High/Low, Light/Dark, Helper/Opponent) and then analyze their relations—except that contemporary criticism is much more conscious of the hierarchical tendency that such pairs tend to have. So the same literary critics who proclaim themselves revolutionaries spend a good portion of their time arguing about whether Jane Austen's fiction serves as an ideological prop for the repressive patriarchy of Regency England (in which case she stands condemned with the Oppressors) or slyly and surreptitiously subverts that tyrannical order (in which case she may properly speak for the Oppressed).

Of course, genuine oppression does go on in the world, and the road that leads you to subtle arguments about how, say, slaves in the American South in the 1830s were somehow complicit in their own oppression, while the slave-owners were in a way victims themselves, is a dangerous road indeed. But the opposition between Oppressor and Oppressed is not, as so many literary critics seem to think, a fulcrum upon which the whole world of discourse can be lifted.

A specific example may help clarify this point. The now-famous first novel of the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), is regularly cited as a great protest against colonialism and cultural imperialism. It is indeed that, and yet it is at the same time a profound critique of the features of Achebe's own Ibo culture which made that culture both ripe for conquest and susceptible to the arguments of Christian missionaries. Achebe says quite openly that one of the reasons Christianity succeeded among many of his people (including his own father) is that it called attention to the fundamental injustice of some Ibo traditions: for instance, excluding some people from the community as *osu* (ritually unclean outcastes), or leaving twins to die in the forest because they were thought to be evil. This kind of social criticism from *within* his culture is an important feature of Achebe's novel, indeed of all his novels, but it is almost always neglected by Western commentators because its complexity doesn't fit their critical categories. Achebe's books, while never relativistic or politically ambivalent, simply cannot be broken down into a neat, blunt opposition between the Oppressors and the Oppressed.

Nor is the problem with these categories merely that they are simplistic. What is far more damaging about most political criticism is the way it can conceive of human action only in socio-cultural terms—it cannot recognize personal moral agency. The Oppressor/Oppressed dichotomy will be appealing only to people who cannot conceive of human action except in the limited terminology of groups and classes. Such thinking constitutes politics without ethics, and politics without ethics can at best give a woefully incomplete account of the hows and whys of human action. In other words, what chiefly afflicts current political criticism is a widespread and uncritical acceptance of social constructionism: the belief that human identity is solely the product of social, historical, and cultural forces and therefore the notion of the human "person" or "subject" must be abandoned or at least deconstructed. As Richard Rorty puts it, with his typical disarming clarity and directness, "Socialization goes all the way down." (The same deconstruction of the person can of course be based on racial and sexual distinctions; and while arguments that depend on race and gender are not precisely identical to those of social constructionism, their logic is quite similar.) Thus many critics use a strictly political vocabulary because for them that has become the only vocabulary available; they have no ethical vocabulary, i.e., a vocabulary of moral agency, because they don't believe in moral agents. Rorty himself has recently tried to articulate some kind of ethics for social constructionism, but with very poor, sometimes ludicrous, results; and even the effort is unusual.

Without going into a lengthy critique of social constructionism, we find two things worth noting. First, there is the question of cultural anthropology, from which much of the impetus for social constructionism derives. Maurice Bloch, himself a cultural anthropologist, has pointed out (in *Ritual, History, and Power*) that the members of his profession have a deep personal and professional investment in finding what makes cultures different, and no investment at all in finding what makes them alike. There is, then, a natural tendency for the anthropological literature—without being either dishonest or intentionally misleading—to suggest the fundamental diversity of cultures while at the same time obscuring their common beliefs, habits, and concerns. And academics are all too ready to welcome uncritically any research which generates distinctions that can be turned into books and essays. As Frederick Crews has noted, it is remarkable how few academics, when confronted with the sweeping assertions of a Foucault or a Lyotard, ask the simple question, "Why should I believe that?"

Second, the belief in a universal human nature has been a powerful force for good in the last two centuries. It is difficult to imagine that Frederick Douglass' and Harriet Tubman's arguments for the abolition of slavery and the equality of blacks under the law of the United States would ever have made much headway without their compelling appeals to

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a human nature shared by people regardless of skin color; and one could say the same about the thoroughly humanistic feminist arguments made by, say, Mary Wollstonecraft and Margaret Fuller. Those who want to discard such convictions now, in the belief that they have lost their usefulness—and this group includes not just Rorty but also many feminists and Afrocentrists—should remember that for Douglass and Tubman and Wollstonecraft and Fuller "human nature" and "human dignity" were not mere concepts to be "used," but rather foundational beliefs forged in the crucible of hard and painful experience.

One is tempted to suspect, then, that belief in social constructionism, with its repudiation of the idea of a common human nature, is a luxury that many people can't afford; it is likely to be appealing only to self-professed skeptics in Western societies who, deep down and despite all their protests to the contrary, know their credentials as persons to be safe from interrogation. The really significant question here is whether the abandonment of the ideas of human nature and the human person might, in the long run, eventually *put* those credentials in danger. As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has written in *Feminism Without Illusions*, "If we need a justice sensitive to the variations of gender, race, and class, we also need one that can transcend or at least discipline them. For without such an ideal, how do we expect to avoid Hobbes' nightmare of society as 'the warre of all against all'?"

If, then, the vast claims of social constructionism fail to compel, we might well consider whether a vocabulary that takes cognizance of personal agency might do a better job of describing how and why we really act—and in the process do a much better job of describing what happens in literary works, and of describing how those works can shape the lives of us, their readers.

Which brings up yet another difficulty for the ideologically and politically minded. That literary works can shape the lives of their readers is for many critics precisely the problem. For many teachers today understand their job to be the liberation of their students from the power that books have over them. A classic example of this impulse comes from Robert Scholes' influential book *Textual Power*, subtitled "Literary Theory and the Teaching of English."

> The students who come to us now exist in the most manipulative culture human beings have ever experienced. They are bombarded with signs, with rhetoric, from their daily awakenings until their troubled sleep, especially with signs transmitted by the audio-visual media. . . .
>
> What students need from us—and this is true of students in our great universities, our small colleges, and our urban and community colleges—what they need from us now is the kind of knowledge and skill that will enable them to make sense of their worlds, to determine their own interests, both individual and collective, to see through the manipulations of all sorts of texts in all sorts of media, and to express their own views in some appropriate manner. . . .
>
> In an age of manipulation . . . the worst thing we can do is foster in them an attitude of reverence before texts. . . . What is needed is a judicious attitude: scrupulous to understand, alert to probe for blind spots and hidden agendas, and finally, critical, questioning, skeptical.

Though his concern for the influence of the media is admirable, it would appear that the only kind of relationship Scholes can imagine between a text and a reader is one of power: either the reader is manipulated by a text, falls under its sway, becomes subject to its power, or he exerts his own power, the power of interpretation and analysis, over that threatening text. Scholes thereby provides a literary theory for Hobbes' "warre of all against all." This makes sense as an account of how to respond to genuinely manipulative media, such as advertisements and political or social propaganda (in which category, one can certainly, especially nowadays, place many works of "literature"), but do we really want to universalize this account of interpretation? When I think about the books I teach—looking at my desk I see Ved Mehta's memoir *The Ledge Between the Streams*, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Richard Rodriguez' autobiography *Hunger of Memory*—I find that Scholes' account of "textual power" simply fails to describe my experience and, I believe, that of most of my students. Scholes wants his students to be able to "make sense of their worlds"—but can't we all point to books that, far from threatening to undermine that effort, have actually been enormously helpful to it? Scholes wants his students to "determine their own interests" and "express their own views," but haven't we all read books that helped us to understand what our interests are and helped us to form our views? Clearly, we need to be able to think about our reading experiences in more ways than the exclusively militaristic one that Scholes offers.

Another example: in an essay called "When Eve Reads Milton," Christine Froula seeks to outline a feminist critique of Milton's *Paradise Lost*—and by extension, of the whole standard academic canon. She argues that we can employ new strategies of reading these canonical texts that expose the "structures of authority" deep inside them, thereby engaging in "a kind of collective psychoanalysis." "In so doing, we approach traditional texts not as the mystifying (and self-limiting) 'best' that has been thought and said in the world but as a visible past against

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which we can imagine a different future." For Froula, we can learn from the past, but what we learn is strictly negative: the past (or at least the past represented by the traditional canon) is no more than a catalogue of sin and error which, through careful study and vigilant self-monitoring, we may be able to avoid repeating. And there is no doubt that Froula's catalogue of *Milton*'s sins and errors is pretty convincing: for all his greatness as a poet, his misogyny is obvious and repulsive. But surely the determination to understand all of literary history (or even all of Milton) in these prosecutorial terms is at least as "self-limiting" as the Arnoldian idea of exposing oneself to "the best that has been thought and said." Like Scholes' notion of textual power, Froula's conception of literary history fails to account for the elements of our reading experience that cannot be explained by reference to power relations.

By way of contrast to the thinking of Scholes and Froula, we might consider the belief of the Kentucky poet and farmer Wendell Berry that the tragedy of literary education today is that "teachers and students read the great songs and stories to learn *about* them, not learn *from* them." We talk and write about literature "as if we do not care, as if it does not matter, whether or not it is true." Now in one sense Froula would agree with Berry: she too wants to learn from "the great songs and stories," but chiefly to learn what *not* to do. Berry obviously means something different: he clearly believes that these "great songs and stories" have been called great because of the weight of truth that they carry. Whereas Froula and Scholes want us to test literature against our own personal standards, Berry wants us to test ourselves against the standards of great literature. Berry's willingness to be taught, his respect for the possibility that those who have walked the earth before him could have learned something valuable, marks an invigorating alternative to the dark visions of Scholes and Froula; nevertheless, one misses in Berry's picture an acknowledgment of the value of the reader's response, of disagreement and critique. No work of literature, however "classical," exhibits wisdom on every subject that it considers; to consider Milton again, one may rejoice in his brilliant evocation of the difference between unfallen and fallen sexuality, yet be properly dismayed by his belief that Adam was made "for God only," Eve, "for God in him."

Might it be possible, then, to avoid *both* Berry's temptation to excessive reverence *and* Scholes and Froula's tendency to cynicism, and to see the literary experience as a simultaneous testing, measuring, of the book and the reader? To ask this question, I believe, is to begin to think ethically about literature. In so doing, we go beyond a vague and essentially content-free reverence for "the classics"; beyond simplistic political polarities; beyond reductive Nietzschean assertions about Power. But what, then, are we getting *into*? Is there anyone who can describe for us, map out for us, this somehow familiar yet exceedingly complex terrain? As it happens, there has in recent years been a serious renewal of interest in the old and honorable discipline of ethical criticism; and the leaders of this renewal deserve our attention.

We might begin with Wayne Booth, because his book *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* is the starting point for any serious reflection on this subject, a storehouse of information about ethical criticism. In fact, the most important thing to note about it is precisely that, that it is a storehouse. *The Company We Keep* is a big book, over five hundred pages. Its chapters vary widely in theme and scope. There is a general defense of ethical criticism, an excursus on myths, and reflections on several controversial authors. In addition, the book contains a virtual anthology of quotations about the ethical implications of reading and writing, along with a positively enormous bibliography (in fact, by my count, the quotations and bibliographical entries combined take up a full ninety-six pages in the book). Booth seems to be attempting to provide as full a representation as he can muster of what he calls "a banned discipline," ethical criticism. The literature of this discipline is so scattered and neglected that Booth has taken it upon himself to gather up the scatterings and bind them together, so that the lengthy and impressive history of ethical reflection about literature can be seen in proper perspective. The apparent sloppiness and patched-together look of the book masks what is in fact its fundamental purpose: not to sustain a single argument, but to give new life to an old and valuable way of thinking about literature.

This is not to say that Booth does not have arguments to make, and important ones, too. One position he explores, for example, to provide a way around the impasse of sheer power versus sheer piety is an argument for the notion of books as *friends*. Now, one of the things especially admirable about Wayne Booth is his willingness to present this notion quite seriously—though he is no doubt perfectly aware that many of us will immediately recall kindly first-grade teachers admonishing us in gentle tones: "Books are our friends, so let's take good care of them." Well, Booth seems to be saying, books—many books, anyway—*are* our friends. But this is no sentimental notion of friendship: it is, to the contrary, grounded in Aristotle's complex and sophisticated analysis of the motives for and consequences of friendship; it is constantly aware of the many varieties of friendship and our ways of assessing good and bad friends; and it acknowledges that friendships may develop, or end, unexpectedly.

Booth's notion of books as friends is important for our concerns here because, as I suggested earlier, it

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teaches us that we don't have to think of our reading solely as a power struggle for control of our minds. His model of reading and criticism is, in a word, dialogical, because each party brings something to the meeting: statements and counterstatements are made, proposals are examined and discussed, gifts are offered and accepted or declined. And just such a dialogical approach is necessary if genuine and meaningful ethical reflection is to arise from our reading experiences.

As the Russian genius Mikhail Bakhtin has pointed out, literature particularly invites such dialogical response, and therefore literature particularly invites ethical reflection. Booth's book tells us how we might bring ethical reflection into the classrooms in which we study, or the books in which we write about, literature. But we can turn that idea around, and in the process turn the argument of this essay around: Bakhtin's ideas suggest that we also need to bring literature into whatever ethical thinking we already do.

When in college, I took a course in Ethics—this is an all-too-familiar experience for those like me who attended college in the seventies—and the teacher's typical technique was to introduce a scenario, a little story intended to illustrate ethical conflict, and then break us up into small groups in which we would argue about how to solve the problem. The sorts of scenarios he used are well-known: there are twelve people in a lifeboat but only enough food and water for six, so how do we decide who should live and who should be tossed overboard? Do we save the welfare mother of five or the neurosurgeon? I always enjoyed arguing about these scenarios—after all, how many of us can resist the offer to play God, to separate Those Who Shall Live from Those Who Shall Die?—and, perhaps for that reason, it never occurred to me to ask why these scenarios so little resembled the ethical decisions I made in my own life. How often is any of us faced with an ethical choice in which we know (or even think we know) *all* the relevant information necessary to make a decision? In real life our choices are much more complex: our information is neither complete nor certain, and our understanding of the potential consequences of our decisions tends to be pretty shaky. For these reasons, Bakhtin has argued, it is in literature, and particularly the great novels, that the most accurate and useful accounts of our moral lives may be found. In the words of Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, "If ethics were an object of knowledge, then philosophy would be the best moral education. But ethics is a matter not of knowledge, but of wisdom. And wisdom, Bakhtin believed, is not systematizable." The great novels are an education in just such wisdom.

A perfect example of what Bakhtin is talking about may be found in the greatest of all English novels, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. The moral agent here is the physician Lydgate, who is in charge of an infirmary that is in need of a chaplain. Lydgate is on the committee that will decide, by vote, who that chaplain will be. There are two candidates: one, Mr. Tyke, whom Lydgate does not know, but who is strongly supported by Mr. Bulstrode, the man who hired Lydgate and pays his salary; the other, Mr. Farebrother, whom Lydgate knows and likes, but about whose religious calling and moral seriousness Lydgate has some doubts. Now, when Lydgate arrives at the meeting during which the vote will be taken . . .

But clearly this is not going to work. In my description I have already had to leave out Lydgate's earlier conversation with Mr. Bulstrode on the subject, and though I have said that Lydgate likes Mr. Farebrother I have not explained how he came to know him, or what precisely his doubts about Farebrother consist of; nor have I said anything about what Mr. Farebrother's own attitude toward his candidacy is, or about his understanding of Lydgate's difficult position, or about what he has said to Lydgate on these subjects. And George Eliot's account of the meeting itself is quite carefully drawn and takes up about a dozen pages, and any mere summary of it would be an injustice too. In the end, I could only use this passage from *Middlemarch* to illustrate Bakhtin's argument about the ethical power of great novels if I could cite the whole section of the book relating to Lydgate's decision; but of course, my very inability to squeeze Eliot's deep and subtle moral analysis into a few paragraphs of an essay proves as well as anything could Bakhtin's point.

Readers of *Middlemarch* know that, in the end, Lydgate's conscience cannot survive his society's constant pressure towards compromise and conformity—perhaps his vote for Mr. Tyke marks the beginning of his descent. And this is one of the reasons why another figure in the pantheon of ethical criticism, Robert Coles, assigns *Middlemarch* to his students at Harvard Medical School. One of his former students, after becoming a doctor, spoke to Coles about his recollections of his reading:

> "There are days when I think of George Eliot and her Lydgate, and I come to the conclusion that lots of us doctors fool ourselves very easily, and that's what *Middlemarch* has to say to me now, just as it did back then. But maybe there's hope. I remember the end of the novel, when she pointed out that you never do know how a life will turn out. (I'm sure paraphrasing!) Well, maybe my friend Lydgate will help me turn the corner—go after what I think is right for me to do, for the sake of my wife and son, and for my own sake, too. I'd hate to end up a

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> driven, driven 'success,' who is bored by what he does, but is always postponing any moral confrontation with himself!"

How easily such a response could be deconstructed. How quickly and surgically could a practiced critic expose the naivete of this man's unconfronted assumptions about meaning, textuality, and the dysfunctional logic of late capitalism. But the same critics who are so quick to dismantle the way Coles and his student think about literature are exceedingly reluctant to interrogate their own discomfort with and resentment of such naivete. Could such discomfort be that of the professional faced with the student amateur's claim to use a book in a way not certified by the professional bureaucracy, such resentment that of the carefully trained specialist faced with Coles the generalist?

These are certainly distinctions for which Coles cares little. Indeed, Coles teaches a series of courses at Harvard—in the college, the business school, the Kennedy School of Government, and the law school, as well as the medical school—whose reading lists are comprised exclusively of literary works. (*Middlemarch* is on several of these lists, so comprehensive is its inquiry into the roots of moral action.) Literature for Coles is a wonderfully versatile tool, useful to him in any number of the tasks he takes on in his academic garden: stories can be counted on to stimulate ethical reflection when other texts seem helpless.

To be sure, the moral pilgrimage of Coles' student cannot simply be endorsed: he speaks of what he thinks is right for him to do, but we don't learn what that is, or whether what's right for him is right for others. Still, it is clear that his comments place us in a wholly different, and far richer, world than the one invoked by Henry Louis Gates' "marionette theater of the political." The ethical, dialogical approach to reading and criticism fostered in their different ways by Booth, Bakhtin, and Coles is far superior to that marionette theater—superior in its comprehension of literary works, superior in its accounts of the human person and of the workings of moral agency.

Yet something may be missing. In the commitment that these writers share to dialogue, to conversation, there is a tendency to forget the matter of ends. *Why* are we conversing? What purpose will this dialogue serve? Will it even in a minor and indirect way help us—a question I hope all Jews and Christians ask—to do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with our God? These are important questions, because even if the dialogical approach is conducive to ethical reflection, how happy can we be with that reflection if it in turn doesn't change the way we act?

This is a problem that Coles seems particularly sensitive to. He quotes a magnificent passage from Anton Chekhov's story "Gooseberries," in which the protagonist, Ivan Ivanych, talks about the despair that comes upon him when he confronts a genuinely happy man (who happens to be his brother):

> Behind the door of every contented, happy man there ought to be someone standing with a little hammer and continually reminding him with a knock that there are unhappy people, that however happy he may be, life will sooner or later show him its claws, and trouble will come to him—illness, poverty, losses, and then no one will see or hear him, just as now he neither sees nor hears others. But there is no man with a hammer. The happy man lives at his ease, faintly fluttered by small daily cares, like an aspen in the wind—and all is well.

Confronted with Ivan Ivanych's wish, Coles asks: "How do we find that 'hammer' for ourselves? . . . Perhaps (and this is a gloomy thought) the best of us are in the tradition of . . . Dr. Chekhov: we are seized by spasms of genuine moral awareness, but we are pliant as aspens in our capacity to accommodate to the prevailing rhythms of the world we inhabit." And one danger of the dialogical/ethical approach to literature is just its tendency to accommodate itself to those "prevailing rhythms." We may enjoy the ethical conversation so deeply, and feel so strongly the need to defend the values of dialogue and conversation, that we forget to ask whether the conversation has a point other than its own continuation.

This is a question that we need to ask Wayne Booth, who, despite the importance of his defense of ethical criticism, has a distressing tendency to back away from the natural consequences of his own approach. For many years Booth has been an articulate and determined advocate of critical pluralism against what he believes to be the very powerful temptations to narrow-mindedness and dogmatism in literary criticism. But as Martha Nussbaum has pointed out, "pluralism" is a word with many meanings, and she contends that Booth uses the word in at least five different ways in *The Company We Keep*. Some of these usages Nussbaum finds acceptable, even admirable: for instance, Booth's claim that we should not try to limit the potential ways in which certain books can be good for us, because there are many different goods which it is legitimate to pursue. But Booth conceives of pluralism in other ways that Nussbaum finds troublingly inconsistent with Booth's emphasis on ethics. For instance, he is so careful not to appear dogmatic that he seems to refer even to his critique of racism as mere elements of his personal "ideology." To this tendency Nussbaum replies, quite rightly: "First of all, it will not work. Many people will hate this book and will call Booth a reactionary; that is the price he will pay for his defense of reason. Second, it sells out his position. Antiracism, by Booth's own account, is not just his 'ideology.' It is an ethical position both

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defensible and defended by rational argument."

Perhaps one of the reasons both Nussbaum and Coles see the dangers of an overly pluralistic, a merely conversational, ethical criticism better than Booth does is that, quite simply, they are not English professors: Coles is a doctor, Nussbaum a philosopher. Neither of them has a professional investment in maintaining the reputation of literature or literary studies as such. Literature for each of them is a resource, a very valuable resource to be sure, but essentially a help, an aid—something to help them in their quest to think better about goodness and to act upon what they think. This way of considering literature can make some English professors uncomfortable: they may feel that it debases literature, makes it the mere handmaiden of other academic disciplines. But is such service really so bad? What would George Eliot have preferred: to be the subject of more professional "readings" or to be read by medical students who find themselves confronted (perhaps for the first time) with the real moral consequences of their professional choices? What Nussbaum and Coles remind us is that literature is simply too important to be left only in the hands of literature professors.

Is there an inconsistency in that last paragraph? At one moment to call literature a mere "tool" and at the next to pronounce it too important to be left to literature professors? The contradiction is only apparent. Auden was right when he claimed that if a poet could make poems both beautiful and useful, he or she would be fulfilling a higher calling than any imagined by the priests of the autonomous imagination. Similarly, Nussbaum contends not only that moral philosophy needs literature, but also that there is a very important sense in which literature needs moral philosophy, or rather, needs for its own fulfillment to be taken seriously as a vehicle of moral knowledge. Thinking of a favorite passage of hers, one in which David Copperfield remembers his unhappy childhood and the time he spent "reading, as it were, for life," Nussbaum writes:

> We do "read for life," bringing to the literary texts we love . . . our pressing questions and perplexities, searching for images of what we might do and be, and holding these up against the images we derive from our knowledge of other conceptions, literary, philosophical, and religious. And the further pursuit of this enterprise through explicit comparison and explanation is not a diminution of the novels at all, but rather an expression of the depth and breadth of the claims that those who love them make for them.

In other words, the best way we can demonstrate our love for great books is to use them in our search to discover "what we might do and be." Paradoxically, the elevation of literature to a quasi-sacred status, protected from the messiness of our historical lives and severed from "the great human family," diminishes literature just as much as the severely prosecutorial power-criticism of Scholes and Froula.

But Nussbaum's ethics makes no room for religious experience and belief; thus it too must be supplemented. Consider, therefore, a passage from the first book of Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*:

> Some things are to be enjoyed, others to be used, and there are others which are to be enjoyed and used. Those things which are to be enjoyed make us blessed. Those things which are to be used help and, as it were, sustain us as we move toward blessedness in order that we may gain and cling to those things which make us blessed. If we who enjoy and use things, being placed in the midst of things of both kinds, wish to enjoy those things which should be used, our course will be impeded and sometimes deflected, so that we are retarded in obtaining those things which are to be enjoyed, or even prevented altogether, shackled by an inferior love.

The love of books is, in Augustine's scheme, an inferior love, but that does not mean it must be an inappropriate one. It is only when that love loses sight of its inferiority, becomes an end in itself, that it "shackles" us. When we use that love and those books to pursue a better life, indeed to pursue blessedness—and there are many and varied ways in which we may use them in that pursuit—then our reading may be wondrously healthy and life-giving. The rigid orthodoxies of current political criticism, the obsessive wrestling over textual power by writers *and* readers, may seem to aid in that quest, but in fact they only impede it. The ethically-impelled reading championed by Booth and Coles and Bakhtin and Nussbaum is sloppy, uncertain, and often confusing; it has no specific theoretical program nor a precisely calibrated methodology. But until literary theory produces its own Augustine, or until we start paying attention to the old one, these are our best instructors in the difficult art of "reading for life." FT

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God and Evolution: An Exchange

I

Howard J. Van Till

Although the rhetoric Phillip E. Johnson employs in his article "Creator or Blind Watchmaker?" (FT, January 1993) differs in some details from that of the "scientific creationists" of North American Christian fundamentalism, the effect of his pronouncements is the same. That is, it perpetuates the association of Christian belief with the rejection of contemporary scientific theorizing, thereby ensuring that the gulf between the academy and the sanctuary will only grow wider. Moreover, ironically, the concept of creation implicit in his argumentation is one that has moved far afield from the Christian theological heritage.

The title of the lecture series from which Johnson's article was adapted was: "Theistic Naturalism and the Blind Watchmaker." That title was considerably more accurate, because the thrust of his contribution is not to offer the reader a choice between belief in the Judeo-Christian Creator or in Richard Dawkins' "blind watchmaker." Rather, his agenda is polemical in character, focused on affixing the label of *theistic naturalism* (a term used ten times) to the positions espoused by some of his Christian critics and arguing that such positions are substantively indistinguishable from the detestable "blind watchmaker hypothesis" of evolutionary naturalism, which, by the heavy-handed effort of the "scientific establishment," is fast "becoming the officially established religion of America."

To borrow a phrase from his earlier article in First Things ("Evolution as Dogma: The Establishment of Naturalism," October 1990), there is in Johnson's writing "just enough truth to mislead persuasively." If, for instance, one were to peruse a representative sample of the popular and semi-popular literature written by the strident preachers of antitheistic naturalism (some textbook literature also qualifies), one could, as did Johnson, find an abundance of reckless assertions that modern science, especially evolutionary biology, has soundly discredited all forms of theism. Finding such offensive rhetoric is not at all difficult, and, in full agreement with Johnson, I find such statements wholly unwarranted and grossly out of place in the public education system.

But Johnson's attack does not stop at an exposé of the triumphalist scientism espoused by a number of highly visible and self-appointed spokesmen for natural science. No, he proceeds zealously in a more ambitious campaign to establish the position that not only is the exploitation of scientific theories for the purposes of antitheism to be rejected, but the scientific theories being thus exploited are to be rejected as well. One of Johnson's central claims is that "doctrinaire naturalism is not just some superfluous philosophical addition to Darwinism that can be discarded without affecting the real 'science' of the matter," but is the very source of the evolutionary paradigm. Johnson's entire program proceeds from his belief that scientific theories regarding macroevolutionary continuity are the products, not of legitimate inference from empirical data, but of naturalistic assumptions that have been imposed on science by Darwin and his followers.

In his book *Darwin on Trial* Johnson says, "Biological evolution is just one major part of a grand naturalistic project, which seeks to explain the origin of everything from the Big Bang to the present without allowing any role to a Creator. . . . The absence from the cosmos of any Creator is therefore the essential starting point for Darwinism." Hence, "Naturalism is not something about which Darwinists can afford to be tentative, because their science is

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based upon it." In Johnson's view, then, the only reason for giving credence to theories that incorporate the idea of genealogical continuity among all lifeforms is their value in promoting the antitheistic worldview of naturalism.

But here's the rub: If biological evolution is, as far as Johnson can see, inextricable from the presuppositions of naturalism, and if evolutionary naturalism is radically opposed to the existence of a supernatural Creator, then how is it possible for a person to be what Johnson calls a "theistic naturalist"? How could one possibly be an authentic Christian theist—one whose worldview is built on belief in the Creator God—and at the same time a proponent of naturalism? Isn't "theistic naturalism" an oxymoron of the highest order?

It would seem so, and this appears to be precisely the kind of conclusion that Johnson would have the readers of FIRST THINGS reach. As he defines it, *theistic naturalism* is a transparently incoherent stance that no rational or intelligent Christian could possibly take. Hence, to be a proponent of such (Johnson offers Diogenes Allen, Ernan McMullin, and myself as prime examples), it would appear that one must give up either rationality, or intelligence, or authentic Christian faith.

It is important to notice how this polemic is crafted. How does Johnson—who, in his own words, approaches the creation-evolution dispute "not as a scientist but as a professor of law, which means among other things that I know something about the way that words are used in arguments"—craft his case against those of us who do see the distinction between scientific theorizing and naturalistic propaganda, who do find considerable scientific merit in the concept of common ancestry among all of God's creatures, and who do so, not in defiance of our Christian heritage or of intellectual integrity, but as an expression thereof? Simply put, by using (or abusing) words and selected connotations in order to lead a reader to discover for himself the intended conclusion.

As an illustration of an especially mischievous use of word associations, consider the word *naturalistic* and the closely related words *naturalism* and *naturalist*. One of the fundamental flaws in Johnson's essay (and the rest of his writing on this issue) is that there are two significantly different meanings of the word *naturalistic* that he uses without a hint of differentiation.

One meaning, I shall call it *naturalistic (narrow)*, is very limited in scope and simply refers to the idea that the physical behavior of some particular material system can be described in terms of the "natural" capacities of its interacting components and the interaction of the system with its physical environment. Hence there is a *naturalistic (narrow)* theory of planetary motion, or of star formation, or of earthquakes, or of cell behavior, or of photosynthesis, or of the development of a zygote into a mature organism.

So understood, *naturalistic (narrow)* speaks only to the idea of the functional integrity of a material system as it acts and interacts in the course of time. No stance regarding the ontological origin of its existence is either specified or implied. Nor is the ultimate source of its capacities for behaving as it does, its purpose in the larger context of all reality, or its relation to divine action or intention. Defined in this way, *naturalistic (narrow)* has no elements or connotations that would in any way be objectionable in principle to Christian belief.

The other definition, I shall call it *naturalistic (broad)*, is far more expansive in scope. It not only includes all of the elements of *naturalistic (narrow)*, but also superimposes the strong metaphysical stipulations that neither the existence nor the behavioral capacities of material systems derive from any divine source (thereby making a Creator unnecessary) and that the behavior of material systems can in no way whatsoever serve in the attainment of any divine purpose. So defined, *naturalistic (broad)* is essentially identical to *materialistic* and is absolutely irreconcilable with Christian theism.

Nowhere does Johnson give evidence of recognizing or honoring the distinction between these two vastly differing meanings of *naturalistic*. Most often the broad and essentially antitheistic meaning is implied (as in his definitions of Darwinism), so that no Christian in his or her right mind could "accommodate" or "compromise with" such a position. However, in the context of applying the pejorative label *theistic naturalism* to the views of Van Till, Allen, and McMullin, the meaning flip-flops between *narrow* and *broad* without any recognition of their profound difference. This strategy ensures that the label *theistic naturalism* will function to convey strongly negative connotations and cast grave doubt on both the intellectual and spiritual integrity of those persons tagged with this epithet.

This sort of semantic sleight of hand may work well to win a legal case in a courtroom, but it does not at all serve to clarify the discussion at hand. Toward the end of his article Johnson calls upon the scientific community to replace "vague words like 'evolution' with a precise set of terms that can be used consistently to illuminate the points of difficulty." Reflecting on the merits of this advice, Johnson goes on to say that "Nobody on any side of the issue should object to clarifying the issues that way—nobody, that is, who really wants to find out the truth." By the measure of his own advice to the scientific community, the law professor's continuing exploitation of verbal ambiguity represents, I believe, the visible tip of an iceberg of misconstrual. Whether intended or not, the propagation of confusion continues.

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A second aspect of Johnson's stance that deserves critical evaluation is his definition or expectation of just what divine creative action is and how it would manifest itself. Although Johnson does not offer us a careful development of this important matter, there is nonetheless a conceptualization of divine creation implicit in his writing. As I see it, Johnson conceives of God's creative activity not only as that singular and uniquely divine act of bringing the universe into being from nothing at the beginning of time, but also as a succession of extraordinary acts in the course of time whereby God forces matter and material systems (such as DNA molecules and living organisms) to do things beyond their resident capacities and therefore different from what they would ordinarily do. One could call this a "theokinetic" concept of creation.

Implicit in Johnson's discussion is the expectation that "real" creative action is of the "miraculous intervention" sort that would "make a difference," specifically a difference that could be unequivocally confirmed by means of empirical science. But is this performance of theokinetic acts the historic Christian picture of what God's creative activity is and how it is manifested? Before we can take up this question, however, we need first to focus on Johnson's own picture and how it relates to the rhetoric of evolutionary naturalism.

I understand Johnson to be saying that if molecules and organisms have in fact accomplished the changes envisioned in the macroevolutionary paradigm simply by employing their own resident capacities (that is, without special "divine assistance"), then molecules and organisms would have accomplished all of the work of creation traditionally ascribed to extraordinary acts of a "supernatural Creator." Furthermore—and this is the part that Johnson's theistic naturalists presumably fail to comprehend—the proponents of evolutionary naturalism would then (by Johnson's measure, that is) be justified in concluding that evolution has made the Creator unnecessary.

If this is Johnson's reasoning, then it would appear to me that he has trapped himself in a misshapen apologetic engagement with antitheistic naturalism. By the apologetic rules imposed by naturalism (ironically similar to those of young-earth creationism), theistic talk regarding creation can mean only *special* creation through acts of "supernatural intervention." Consequently, the proponents of antitheistic naturalism have occasion to delight whenever they can identify a material mechanism (as a Christian theist I would prefer to call it creaturely action) that accomplishes something that special creationists have reserved for supernatural intervention.

However, since our scientific knowledge of creaturely action is (and always will be) incomplete, the special creationist can always hold out the possibility that there are other missing elements in the developmental economy of the physical universe. Although Johnson wishes to distance himself from the position of young-earth creationists, he tends to employ the same rhetorical strategy of treating the absence of evidence (say, for some process or activity thought to be an important contribution to evolutionary change) as if it were evidence for the absence of full genealogical continuity. By this means a place for "real" creation by a supernatural Creator is secured, giving rise to "a nature that points directly and unmistakably [by scientific measure, presumably] toward the necessity of a creator."

In discussions of this sort Johnson adamantly denies that he is espousing a God-of-the-gaps strategy, but I must admit that I cannot distinguish his argumentation on this point from that of the young-earth creationists, which is built on the assumption that there must exist gaps in the developmental economy of the created world—gaps that can be bridged only by acts of supernatural intervention into the course of otherwise natural phenomena. Gaps in our scientific understanding are not important in themselves, but they gain profound significance by being recognized as indicators of gaps in the economy of the created world. Hence, Johnson is tolerant of a great deal of "microevolution" within the limits of some category of classification, provided that such phenomena (or any other natural processes) not be presumed capable of warranting a macroevolutionary theory concerning how these distinct categories of creatures "came to exist in the first place."

Caught in the jaws of this fruitless apologetic debate, in which the existence or nonexistence of an "active" Creator is to be decided on the basis of whether there are or are not gaps in the genealogical history of lifeforms, Johnson speaks as if the only conceivable reason for favoring an unbroken genealogical continuity is that it appears to give the proponents of antitheistic naturalism an apologetic advantage. Against the background of the dynamics of this apologetic struggle, we can see why Johnson wishes to place under a dark cloud of doubt and suspicion those Christians who are caught in the act of favoring the concept of a created world endowed with a gapless economy that could conceivably provide the basis for the full genealogical continuity envisioned in the macroevolutionary paradigm. They must be identified publicly as persons of questionable intelligence and dubious faith who seek a "compromise" of irreconcilable perspectives, who have "embraced naturalism with enthusiasm" and strive to "baptize" it for incorporation into the body of contemporary Christian belief. Beware, dear friends, of those *theistic naturalists*, whose twisted reasoning "establishes a remarkable convergence of Christian theism and scientific naturalism." So goes the accusatory rhetoric.

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But we must get back to the issue of what kind of activity divine creation is and how we would recognize it. Johnson and other skeptics of macroevolutionary continuity appear to be looking expectantly for "evidence" (I presume this to mean the kind of evidence to which natural science has privileged access) that confirms that God's creative activity has "made a difference." To the question, "What difference would it make if there were no Creator?" traditional Judeo-Christian theism has replied, "If no Creator, then no created world." In other words, the very existence of the world of which we are a part is sufficient evidence for the action of the Creator. No further proof, not even modern scientific argumentation, is necessary. Contrary to all of the rhetorical bluster of materialism in its many forms, neither the existence of the world nor the character of its functional economy is self-explanatory.

It appears, however, that this traditional answer is not sufficiently convincing to the law professor. Hence we must seek evidence for divine creative action of the sort that would convince any honest and intelligent twentieth-century person that we had proved our case beyond the shadow of doubt in the court of scientific rationality. In Johnson's words, "If God stayed in that realm beyond the reach of scientific investigation, and allowed an apparently blind materialistic evolutionary process to do all the work of creation, then it would have to be said that God furnished us with a world of excuses for unbelief and idolatry."

This remarkable statement follows Johnson's appeal to Romans 1, from which he presumably derives his claim that we should expect to find, by unbiased scientific analysis of the empirical data relevant to the formative history of distinctly differing life forms, evidence for the kind of "supernatural assistance" that had "made a difference." One cannot help but wonder concerning the sorry plight of all those poor folks who, "ever since the creation of the world" and before the advent of modern biological science, were deprived of this essential evidence.

In personal correspondence, I once asked Johnson to help me understand how this evidential test would work by telling me just how one would establish a "no divine action baseline" to which actual processes and events could be compared. Armed with a knowledge of this baseline we could perform the crucial test and settle the apologetic question of the ages once and for all. Johnson chose not to answer my question. Perhaps he would be willing now to do so for the readers of FIRST THINGS and tell us just what biological history would have been like if left to natural phenomena without "supernatural assistance."

Now it is time to return to the historical question regarding the way that God's creative action and its visible manifestation have been pictured by Christian stalwarts of the past. Because of my personal interest in this matter I have been studying the relevant works of Basil and Augustine from the Late Patristic period, especially their reflections on the creation narratives of Genesis.

In the words of one Patristic scholar, "Saint Basil's work on the *Hexaemeron* is one of the most important Patristic works on the doctrine of creation." Delivered as a series of nine homilies, this work has the style of material spoken to inspire praise of the Creator, not the style of a treatise written to be subjected to philosophical or theological scrutiny. Nonetheless, to examine Basil's homilies for their general concept of the nature of the created world and the character of God's creative activity is an instructive exercise.

Summarized as succinctly as possible, Basil's picture of creation is one in which God, by the unconstrained impulse of his effective will, instantaneously called the substance of the entire Creation into being at the beginning and gave to the several created substances the harmoniously integrated powers to actualize, in the course of time, the wonderful array of specific forms that the Creator had in mind from the outset. Both matter and the forms it was later to attain were the product of God's primary act of creation. Reflecting, for example, on the earth being initially without the adornment of grass, cornfields, or forests, Basil notes that, "Of all this nothing was yet produced; the earth was in travail with it in virtue of the power that she had received from the Creator."

In Basil's judgment, harmony, balance, and provision for all future needs are characteristics of the created world that deserve our profound appreciation. Both fire and water, for example, are necessary for the economy of terrestrial life as we know it. But these two elements (as understood in Basil's day) must be provided in correct proportions so that neither one will consume the other. Observing the comfortable balance that appeared to prevail between these two contending substances, Basil says that we owe "thanks to the foresight of the supreme Artificer, Who, from the beginning, foresaw what was to come, and at the first provided all for the future needs of the world." From this it follows, of course, that the Creator need make no special adjustments at some later date to compensate for inadequate provision at the beginning. "He who, according to the word of Job, knows the number of the drops of rain, knew how long His work would last, and for how much consumption of fire he ought to allow. This is the reason for the abundance of water at the creation."

Because each element is called upon to contribute its natural activity to the functional economy of the created world, Basil considered it essential to make clear that even these natures are the product of God's creative word and are not the manifestation of any powers independent of God. "Think, in reality, that a word of God makes the nature, and that this order is for the creature a direction for its future course."

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The divine command recorded in Genesis 1:11, "Let the earth bring forth grass . . .," is for Basil God's empowering of the earth for all time with the capacities to assemble and sustain all manner of plant life. This command from God "gave fertility and the power to produce fruit for all ages to come." In several ways Basil expresses his conviction that although the Creator's word is spoken in an instant, the Creation's obedient response is extended in time. "God did not command the earth immediately to give forth seed and fruit, but to produce germs, to grow green, and to arrive at maturity in the seed; so that this first command teaches nature what she has to do in the course of the ages." And in language that seems almost to anticipate modern scientific concepts Basil goes on to say that, "Like tops, which after the first impulse, continue their evolutions, turning themselves when once fixed in their centre; thus nature, receiving the impulse of this first command, follows without interruption the course of the ages, until the consummation of all things." Furthermore, "He who gave the order at the same time gifted it with the grace and power to bring forth." This is consistent with an earlier comment on the Holy Spirit's activity in creation, "The Spirit . . . prepared the nature of water to produce living beings."

In his reflections on the words, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature," Basil speaks eloquently of the Creation actively carrying out the effective will of the Creator. "Behold the word of God pervading creation, beginning even then the efficacy which is seen displayed today, and will be displayed to the end of the world! As a ball, which one pushes, if it meet a declivity, descends, carried by its form and the nature of the ground and does not stop until it has reached a level surface; so nature, once put in motion by the Divine command, traverses creation with an equal step through birth and death, and keeps up the succession of kinds through resemblance, to the last."

Consistent with the world picture of his day, Basil, of course, envisions no historical transformation of these varied kinds; but at the same time he offers no theological objection whatever to the concept of spontaneous generation of living creatures from earthly substance alone. For instance, "We see mud alone produce eels; they do not proceed from an egg, nor in any other manner; it is the earth alone which gives them birth. 'Let the earth produce a living creature.'" It would seem, then, that Basil envisions the first appearance of each kind of living creature occurring in like manner, the earth having been endowed from the beginning with all of the powers necessary to physically realize the whole array of life-forms created in the mind of God. The elements of the world, created by God from nothing at the beginning, lacked none of the capacities that would be needed in the course of the ages to bring forth what God intended. The economy of the created world was, from the outset, complete—neither cluttered with things that had no useful function nor lacking any capacity integral to its functional economy. In Basil's words, "Our God has created nothing unnecessarily and has omitted nothing that is necessary."

In his work *De Genesi ad litteram (The Literal Meaning of Genesis)*, St. Augustine provides an extensive commentary on the first three chapters of Genesis. His goal is to demonstrate a one-to-one correspondence between the text of these chapters and what actually took place in the creative work of God; in fact, this is precisely how he defines the term "literal" in this endeavor. In contrast to modern biblical literalism, however, Augustine shows no disdain for interpreting certain words and phrases in early Genesis in a figurative sense, but even these figurative readings are firmly bounded by the controlling assumption that Genesis 1-3 is "a faithful record of what happened."

In constructing his literal reading, Augustine makes extensive use of the analogy of Scripture; the meanings of words or phrases in Genesis are often decided by comparison with other relevant texts. But Augustine is equally insistent that the literal meaning thereby derived may never stand in contradiction to one's competently derived knowledge about the "earth, the heavens, and the other elements of this world," knowledge that one rightfully "holds to as being certain from reason and experience." In a tone that leaves no doubt concerning his attitude, Augustine soundly reprimands those Christians who defend interpretations of Scripture that any scientifically knowledgeable non-Christian would recognize as nonsense. "Reckless and incompetent expounders of Holy Scripture bring untold trouble and sorrow on their wiser brethren when they are caught in one of their mischievous false opinions and are taken to task by those who are not bound by the authority of our sacred books."

For a number of reasons, Augustine, like Basil, concludes that God created "all things together" in one initial, all-inclusive, and instantaneous creative act. But the initial and simultaneous creation of "all things together," reported to us within the literary framework of a six-day narrative, should not be taken to mean that all created things suddenly materialized in mature form at the beginning. With considerable labor and repetition, Augustine developed a rather sophisticated program of interpretation by which he sought to distinguish what took place at the beginning from what took place in the course of time. In the beginning, according to Augustine, God called into being all created substance and all creaturely forms. At this beginning all created forms existed both in the mind of God and in the formable substances of the created world. But in the formable substances the creaturely forms did not exist actually, but only potentially. Although the creaturely forms

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were not yet actualized in visible, material beings, these forms were there potentially in the powers and capacities, called by Augustine "causal reasons" or "seed principles," with which the Creator had originally endowed the created substances.

Perhaps we should let Augustine speak for himself on this issue: "But from the beginning of the ages, when day was made, the world is said to have been formed, and in its elements at the same time there were laid away the creatures that would later spring forth with the passage of time, plants and animals, each according to its kind. . . . In all these things, beings already created received at their own proper time their manner of being and acting, which developed into visible forms and natures from the hidden and invisible reasons which are latent in creation as causes. . . . [W]hat He had originally established here in causes He later fulfilled in effects." Finally, "some works belonged to the invisible days in which He created all things simultaneously, and others belong to the days in which He daily fashions whatever evolves in the course of time from what I might call the primordial wrappers."

Now, lest we be tempted to infer that Augustine is thereby proposing a macroevolutionary scenario in which these emerging lifeforms are genealogically related, we must immediately note that he in fact offers no suggestion whatsoever of any historical modification of the created "kinds." Consistent with the world picture of his day, Augustine envisioned each unique "kind" of creature to have been individually conceptualized in the Creator's initial act of creation and independently actualized as the causal reasons functioned to give material form to the conceptual forms created in the beginning. Standing in the tradition of a hierarchically structured cosmos populated with fixed kinds of creatures, Augustine had sufficient reason to envision the independent creation and formation of each kind. And without any knowledge of genetic variability or of the temporal succession of lifeforms over a multibillion-year timespan, Augustine had no basis for questioning either that tradition or the concept of spontaneous generation.

In the context of our present concern, however, I wish to draw attention, not to the particulars of Augustine's portrait of God's creative work, articulated in the conceptual vocabulary of his day, but to one of his underlying presuppositions concerning the character of the created world: the universe was brought into being in a less than fully formed state but endowed with the capacities to transform itself, in conformity with God's will, from unformed matter into a marvelous array of structures and lifeforms. In other words, Augustine envisioned a Creation that was, from the instant of its inception, characterized by *functional integrity*. Every category of structure and creature and process was conceptualized by the Creator from the beginning but actualized in time as the created material employed its God-given capacities in the manner and at the time intended by the Creator from the outset.

What is the point of bringing Basil and Augustine into our critique of Johnson's essay? Are Basil and Augustine to be treated as authorities on the chronology or the historical particulars regarding the formation of species? Of course not. Since their day, fifteen centuries ago, we have learned, for instance, that the spontaneous generation concept of that time fails to be viable. And we have learned that the history of lifeforms spans billions of years and is marked by patterned change. The first organisms were unicellular; today a marvelous diversity of both unicellular and multicellular forms exists. We have learned that species come and go, and that most of the lifeforms that once lived are now extinct. And we have learned that on the molecular level the present array of species exhibit relationships that strongly support the idea—drawn earlier from morphological, biogeographical, and paleobiological considerations—that all species share a common ancestry. (This thesis is most strongly affirmed by similarities, not in the small portion of DNA that functions genetically, but in the greater portion, sometimes called "junk" DNA, in which no similarities at all would be expected on a special or independent creationist picture. In fact, they would have to be considered mischievously misleading.)

No, Basil and Augustine have no lessons for us on matters biological. But as I reflect on the sorry state of contemporary discussion regarding the relationship of Christian belief and evolutionary science, I am convinced that the fruitfulness of our discourse would be vastly improved if we could recover from their theological work what I have come to call "the forgotten doctrine of Creation's functional integrity." Basil and Augustine held high views of what God brought into being. The created world envisioned by Basil and Augustine was a world endowed by the Creator with a functionally complete economy—no gaps, no deficiencies, no need for God to overpower matter or to perform theokinetic acts in order to make up for capacities missing in the economy of the created world. (The question of miracles performed by God in a world having such a gapless economy is an entirely different matter and is under no threat from the concept of functional integrity. The issue here is the character of the world within which God acts and with which God interacts.)

But if we grant that molecules and organisms do have the capacities to bring about the genetic and morphological changes envisioned in contemporary biological theorizing, have we then capitulated to naturalism? Are physical/chemical/biological processes like mutation and selection (plus all of the other relevant processes) doing the *creating*? From a theistic perspective, certainly not. These processes

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need not and cannot create anything.

I believe that we Christians are warranted in seeing every potentially viable lifeform (or every viable variant of DNA) as something thoughtfully conceived in the mind of the Creator. As did Basil and Augustine, I believe that we may rightfully speak of God calling into being at the beginning, from nothing, all material substance and all creaturely forms (whether inanimate structures or animate lifeforms). And, still standing with Basil and Augustine, I believe that we may rightfully presume that the array of structures and lifeforms now present was not yet present at the beginning, but became actualized in the course of time as the created substances, employing the capacities thoughtfully given to them by God at the beginning, functioned in a gapless creational economy to bring about what the Creator called for and intended from the outset.

In the context of this traditional Christian vision of God's creative work (notably different from Johnson's theokinetic picture), we might now wish to employ the vocabulary of twentieth-century science and speak about the full array of functionally viable forms of DNA (and the creatures thereby represented) as constituting a "possibility space" of potential lifeforms—this possibility space itself, along with all connective pathways, being an integral component of the world brought into being at the beginning. Furthermore, in the language of this theistic paradigm of evolutionary creation we would speak of DNA being enabled by the Creator to employ random genetic variation as a means to *explore* and *discover* (in contrast to *create*) viable pathways and novel lifeforms so that the Creator's intentions for the formative history of the Creation might be actualized in the course of time.

See, then, what this evolutionary creation paradigm accomplishes: Do material processes have to create? No, the possibility space of viable and historically achievable lifeforms is an integral aspect of the world that God created at the beginning. Material systems need only employ their God-given functional capacities to discover some of the possibilities thoughtfully prepared for them. But, one might ask, how can such "mindless" material processes function to bring about what appears to be the product of "intelligent design"? The point is that they are not really mindless at all. Rather, every one of these processes and every connective pathway in the possibility space of viable creatures is itself a mindfully designed provision from a Creator possessing unfathomable intelligence.

It seems to me that this theistic paradigm provides precisely what the naturalistic (broad) paradigm—the blind watchmaker hypothesis—could not. It provides the answer to the question, How is it possible that such a remarkable array of lifeforms is not only viable but historically realizable within the economy of the world at hand? Could anything less than the infinite creativity and faithful providence of God suffice?

Surely not. Hence my rejection of the blind watchmaker hypothesis of Darwinism, but without the necessity of rejecting the possibility of genealogical continuity along with it.

I have a dream that some day the forgotten doctrine of Creation's functional integrity will be recovered; that it will once and for all displace all variants of the God-of-the-gaps perspective; that the empirically derived confidence in the concept of genealogical continuity will no longer give apologetic advantage to the proponents of antitheistic naturalism; and that the whole enterprise of scientific theory evaluation will no longer be distorted by counterproductive entanglement with the authentically religious debate between theism and atheism. When that happens, the declarations of atheistic purposelessness offered by Jacques Monod, William Provine, or Richard Dawkins and company will have to be defended on their religious merit alone. They will have lost the services of science, once held hostage by strident preachers of materialism, and once held in distrustful suspicion by a misguided portion of the Christian community.

II

Phillip E. Johnson

Perhaps the best way to start is by answering Howard Van Till's question: just what would biological history have been like if left to natural phenomena without God's participation? If God had created a lifeless world, even with oceans rich in amino acids and other organic molecules, and thereafter had left matters alone, life would not have come into existence. If God had done nothing but create a world of bacteria and protozoa, it would still be a world of bacteria and protozoa. Whatever may have been the case in the remote past, the chemicals we see today have no observable tendency or ability to form living cells, and single-celled organisms have no observable tendency or ability to form complex plants and animals. Persons who believe that chemicals unassisted by intelligence can combine to create life, or that bacteria can evolve by natural processes into complex animals, are making an a priori assumption that nature has the resources to do its own creating.

I call such persons metaphysical *naturalists*. Throughout this reply, as in the original paper, I use the term "naturalism" in what Van Till would call the broad sense. Of course, theists recognize that experience has shown that a great many phenomena

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have natural causes that are accessible to scientific investigation. To a theist there is nothing surprising about this, because the universe is a product of the mind of God and the inquiring mind of man was created in God's image. Whether such extraordinary events as the origin of life, the origin of the plant and animal phyla, or the origin of human consciousness can be satisfactorily explained in terms of unintelligent natural causes should be an open question for theists. A person who assumes a priori that such creation events *must* have scientifically ascertainable material causes is a metaphysical naturalist. If he believes in God he is a theistic naturalist, who limits God's freedom by the dictates of naturalistic philosophy.

The subject of my essay was not "genealogical continuity," or "common ancestry," or even "a gapless economy of creation." I agree with Howard Van Till that concepts like these can easily be incorporated into a genuinely theistic worldview. My theology does not require that God create by what Van Till calls "theokinetic acts," or by any other particular method. If God exists at all, He could create by whatever means He chooses, whether or not the choice pleases me, Van Till, or the rulers of evolutionary biology. Determination of the method that God actually employed should be left to unbiased scientific research. On the other hand, theists should not accept a definition of "science" that excludes the possibility of divine action, nor should they accept Darwinian theory uncritically merely because it is the leading naturalistic explanation for life's diversity and complexity. We ought to scrutinize the evidence independently, and consider the possibility that Darwinists have derived their theory more from naturalistic philosophy than from empirical evidence. Maybe what God chose to do just isn't known to the evolutionary biologists of today.

My target was the Blind Watchmaker thesis, the crucial Darwinian claim about *how* very simple life forms were transformed into the highly complex organisms that inhabit the planet today, including ourselves. The Blind Watchmaker thesis says that natural selection, in combination with random mutation, has the kind of creative power needed to make complex plants and animals out of very much simpler predecessors. If Darwinian selection does not have the required creative power, then "evolution" in some general sense may still be true, but science does not know how creative evolution has occurred.

The evidence that Darwinian mechanism either could or did make flowers, insects, whales, and human beings from single-celled microorganisms is not impressive. The fossil record is notoriously inconsistent with the Darwinian model of continuous change in tiny increments. Selective breeding, which in any case presupposes the guiding power of human intelligence, produces change only within the limits of the existing gene pool. The peppered moth story, which involves no creation whatsoever, is still the most important example of the creative power of natural selection. If one considers only the empirical evidence, the Blind Watchmaker thesis is a fantastic extrapolation from clearly inadequate evidence.

The fundamental error that theistic evolutionists like Van Till make is to assume that, because the modern neo-Darwinian evolutionary synthesis is classified as "science," it is supported by impartially evaluated empirical evidence. This is not true, and I think Van Till at some level realizes that it is not true. He accuses me of "treating the absence of evidence (say, for some process of activity thought to be an important contribution to evolutionary change) as if it were evidence for the absence of full genealogical continuity." The process or activity in question is the Darwinian process of creation by mutation and selection. The absence of evidence for *that* process is hardly something to be brushed aside as "rhetoric." It means that, contrary to the expansive claims of Darwinists, empirical investigation has not discovered a mechanism by which the fantastically complex structures of plants and animals can be built from vastly simpler organisms like bacteria and protozoa.

Whether "genealogical continuity" in some sense unites all living things is another question. Certain features, like the existence of natural groups and common "junk DNA" sequences, support an inference that there was some sort of process of development from some common source. We may call that process "common ancestry," but it does not necessarily follow that we are referring to the ordinary process of reproduction that we observe in today's world, where ancestors give birth to descendants very much like themselves. Normal reproduction is not known to produce radically new organs or organisms, and if it did so it would have to proceed one tiny step at a time. In fact there is a great deal of evidence that innovative transformations must have involved organisms doing something "different from what they ordinarily do." The hypothetical single-celled organism that produced as descendants all the animal phyla appearing suddenly in the Cambrian era—without leaving a trace of the developmental process in the fossil record—was not doing just what single-celled organisms ordinarily do. The same is true of the hypothetical four-footed mammal ancestor of whales and bats. What actually did cause such a vast transformation remains utterly mysterious, as far as anyone can determine from scientific evidence.

That is where the philosophy of scientific naturalism comes in, to make a weak case practically invulnerable to criticism. Naturalism teaches that intelligence and purpose did not come into existence until they evolved, and so chemical and biological evolution had to be purposeless, unguided processes.

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The task of science is to propose plausible mechanisms by which such naturalistic evolution could have occurred. Darwinian selection is the most plausible candidate that anyone has been able to suggest, and so despite the poor fit with the evidence it holds its position as the "best scientific theory." The evidence that is consistent with this theory is cited as confirmation. The evidence that conflicts with it is ignored, or dismissed as unimportant.

Metaphysical naturalists understandably don't require much confirming evidence for a thesis that is so congenial to their philosophy. They also see no point in criticisms that point out the inadequacy of the supporting evidence. If this particular version of the Blind Watchmaker thesis is faulty, then something else very much like it must be true anyway. What else could have happened? If one believes in the existence of an omnipotent creator, a lot else could have happened. Nonetheless, many of the most influential voices in Christian academia are as protective of Darwinian "scientific theory" as the metaphysical naturalists. Even though they acknowledge that practically all the leading Darwinists of the twentieth century have employed their theory in popular presentations and textbooks to discredit the idea that God had anything to do with our creation, these Christian intellectuals insist that the theory itself is entirely benign, and even conducive to a theistic interpretation.

Van Till exposes the reason for this protective attitude clearly enough in his opening paragraph, when he accuses me of trying to "perpetuate the association of Christian belief with the rejection of contemporary scientific theorizing, thereby ensuring that the gulf between the academy and the sanctuary will only grow wider." As he sees it, the job of Christian intellectuals is not to challenge the picture of reality provided by a science committed to naturalism, but to accept the picture and show how it can be given a theistic interpretation. Reconciliation is achieved by softening the blunt edges of the Darwinian claim with soothing language. When translated into the vocabulary of theistic evolution, the claims of the Darwinists sound innocent enough. All the scientists are really saying, we are told, is that there is evidence for "genealogical continuity"—like junk DNA sequences—and modest claims like that do not rule out the possibility that evolution is a God-directed process. More than that, "evolution" can be likened to the complex theories of creation stated by revered early Christian authorities like Augustine—provided, of course, that we ignore the naturalistic metaphysical baggage that the word "evolution" carries when it is used in the Darwinist literature. If we let such reassurance lull our critical faculties to sleep we can sleep in peace. Science and religion can lie down together like the lion and the lamb, as long as the lambs do not provoke the lions by challenging their theories.

I do not doubt that Van Till and others can interpret "evolution" to their Christian audiences in a genuinely theistic manner. What those audiences need to understand, however, is that theistic evolution is not what the reigning scientific and educational authorities have in mind when they propose to teach every school child that "evolution is fact." They mean fully naturalistic evolution, complete with the Blind Watchmaker thesis, because they regard metaphysical naturalism as the indispensable philosophical basis of science. If persons like Van Till were in charge of science education things might be different, but in fact theists have very little influence. It is the view of evolution taken by authorities like Stephen Jay Gould, Richard Dawkins, Carl Sagan, and Douglas Futuyma that actually teaches the public and the students, and that view is rigorously and uncompromisingly naturalistic.

It is Van Till and not I who characterized theistic naturalism as "a transparently incoherent stance that no rational or intelligent Christian could possibly take." I do think that theistic naturalism is ultimately incoherent, but the incoherence is not obvious and it is understandable that many rational and intelligent Christians have overlooked it. First, we have all been taught to think of "science" as a neutral, objective process of fact-finding that is not biased in favor of a comprehensive metaphysical naturalism. In consequence the conclusions of science must be accepted by anyone who wants to be considered rational by the standards of the academic world. When "science says" that natural selection can accomplish wonders of creativity, that is the end of the matter. Religion cannot survive in a naturalistic academic culture if it opposes science, and so religion must accommodate to science on the best terms it can get. Effectively, that means that God must be exiled to that shadowy realm before the Big Bang, and He must promise to do nothing thereafter that might cause trouble between theists and the scientific naturalists.

In short, theistic naturalism is best understood as an intellectual strategy for coping with a desperate situation. It was barely tenable as a philosophical position as long as the leading scientists believed, or pretended to believe, that science is a limited research activity which does not aspire to occupy the entire realm of knowledge. Today many of the world's most famous physicists are proclaiming the imminent prospect of a "theory of everything"—and they do mean *everything*. It may be that these physicists—and the evolutionary biologists who talk just like them—are no longer practicing "science" and have become metaphysicians. What is important is that they mix metaphysics and science together and present the whole package to the public with all the awe-inspiring authority of science. I have read that 500 million persons have seen Carl Sagan's *Cosmos* series, many of them in the public schools, and very

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few of them were warned that "What you are about to see is metaphysics, not science." The *Time* cover story for December 28, 1992 says it all: the title asks "What Does Science Tell Us About God?" The answer is *plenty*, and more all the time.

Obviously I offended Van Till with that phrase "theistic naturalism." In a way I am sorry for that, for he is a decent and honorable person whom I would like to have for a friend. But it is necessary to send a wake-up call to a Christian academia that has complacently assumed that mild protests against the most explicitly metaphysical claims by scientists are all that is needed to maintain an intellectually respectable place for theistic religion. The situation is far more serious than that. Metaphysical naturalism has taken over mainstream science, not in a superficial sense but in a profound sense. Purportedly factual claims—like the power of mutation and selection to create complex organs—are based upon philosophical reasoning rather than empirical investigation.

The real danger is not from the metaphysical statements that come explicitly labelled as such, but from the implicit metaphysics that generates seemingly objective facts and theories. Van Till writes that we must carefully distinguish "between scientific theorizing and naturalistic propaganda." I agree, but we also need to recognize that the persons who now rule science do not themselves know how to make that distinction, and do not even want to make it. We will have to teach them that naturalistic philosophy and scientific investigation are not the same thing, and we cannot even begin to do that if our first priority is to avoid conflict with the rulers of science. FT

Simple Anna

Simple Anna liked the words
although she didn't understand
what many of them meant. Her man
sometimes could make them into worlds
where forests shaded green young girls.

The girls were always what she was
when what she was was what she dreamed.
By herself she never dreamed,
not any more. A woman does
such daylight things to what she is.

The words could be some country tree
and she again Anne Hathaway,
complex with what she still could be
while watching in an English shade
with all of heaven as a stage.

Kent Gramm

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Review Essay

Jewish Ethics Engaged

Edward T. Oakes

JEWISH SOCIAL ETHICS. By DAVID NOVAK. *Oxford University Press. 252 pp. $39.95.*

The renowned scholar of Talmudic Judaism, Jacob Neusner, once characterized the divergence between first-century Judaism and nascent Christianity as fundamentally a divergence of locale. That is, each religion—working from mutually exclusive interpretations of why God formed Israel to be a "light unto the nations"—located the arena where God was working to save the world in two quite different "geographies":

> For between Christ, universally known and triumphant, and Torah, the spiritual treasure of a tiny, harassed, abused people, seldom fully known and never long victorious, stands the abyss: mastery of the world on the one side, the sacrifice of the world on the other. Perhaps the difference comes at the very start when the Christians, despite horrendous suffering, determined to conquer and save the world and to create the new Israel. The rabbis, unmolested and unimpeded, set forth to transform and regenerate the old Israel. For the former, the arena of salvation was all humankind, the actor was a single man. For the latter, the course of salvation began with Israel, God's first love, and the stage was that singular but paradigmatic society, the Jewish people.

It would be too imprecise to categorize these two different shifts of focus as "domestic" versus "international," but there is an undoubted contrast between the transposition of the Torah (primarily a Temple-focused Law) to the domestic and communal scene of everyday Jewish life, and the command to "go out and make disciples of all nations." Nor would we gain in precision by attributing this transposition of the Torah simply to the trauma of the destruction of the Second Temple in the 70th year of our Common Era, as if Torah were being domesticated *faute de mieux* and not out of a sense of its abiding validity "until the Messiah come." At work, then, in this parting of ways is a much more fundamental difference about the meaning and place of Israel (however defined) in the economy of God's providential design to redeem the world:

> To save the world the apostle had to suffer in and for it, appear before magistrates, subvert empires. To redeem the Jewish people the rabbi had to enter into, share, and reshape the life of the community, deliberately eschew the politics of nations and patiently submit to empires. The vision of the apostle extended to all nations and peoples. Immediate suffering therefore was the welcome penalty to be paid for eventual universal dominion. The rabbi's eye looked upon Israel, and, in his love for Jews, he sought not to achieve domination or to risk martyrdom, but rather to labor for social and spiritual transformation, which was to be accomplished through the complete union of his life with that of the community. The one was a prophet to the nations, the other, priest to the people. No wonder then that the apostle earned the crown of martyrdom, but prevailed in history; while the rabbi received martyrdom, when it came, only as one of and wholly within the people. He gave up the world and its conversion in favor of the people and their regeneration.

So fundamental is this difference, that even when they hold certain beliefs in common—belief in one God, acknowledgment of the inspiration of the Hebrew Scriptures, trust in God's providential will to save the world—these two religions *structure* these beliefs in patterns of life that diverge so deeply that it is no wonder dialogue between Jews and Christians in the ancient and medieval (and often, modern) world seems to be like that of two people talking past each other. In retrospect, it is clear that the representatives of these two faiths never even came close to acknowledging their basic disagreements about terms—which is why ancient disputes centering on the fulfillment (or lack thereof) of Old Testament prophecies never got anywhere, as the second-century "dialogue" between Justin Martyr and the Rabbi Trypho bears out.

Now one of the great consequences of this empire-submissive, politics-eschewing stance of normative rabbinic Judaism has been the absence of any developed tradition of Jewish social ethics, a point that David Novak explicitly acknowledges in his recent daring book of essays (daring because he senses how much he must build on a foundation

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meant for another house): "Questions of political policy pertain to areas where the very political marginalization of the Jews made the normative Jewish tradition inoperative and thus cease to develop."

Christianity, however, had to face the challenge of developing a coherent position on a whole array of political and social-ethical issues almost from the outset. I say "almost," for the New Testament is itself remarkably insouciant about social issues: while recommending obedience to established authorities (Romans 13:1-7), it condemns the Roman Leviathan in the harshest possible terms, apparently never envisioning a possible future modus vivendi between Church and Empire (Revelation 18:1-24); yet it tolerates the institution of slavery without much comment (Philemon) and seems to countenance war as part of the expected pattern of things (Luke 14:31-33). But by the time the canon of the New Testament was formed, the challenge could no longer be avoided. For as Christianity began its empire-subverting and world-conquering outreach, it encountered not only the harshness of Roman rule but also a theory of society and politics of immense richness, depth, antiquity, and complexity. Yet nothing in the resources of either the Old or the New Testament seemed immediately applicable to questions raised in Plato's *Republic* or Aristotle's *Politics*.

And then, just as the "world" was on the verge of being fully "conquered," the barbarian invasions raised a new challenge, for now Christianity had to answer the pagan charge that these invasions were a direct result of the abandonment of the gods by the Empire. It was left to St. Augustine to answer that challenge with his epochal *City of God*, and with it Christian political and social theory may be said to have come into full bloom.

This remarkable book determined the political and social worldview of Western Christianity all the way to the Enlightenment (and beyond), answering pagan critics point by point, but more crucially taking such important biblical themes as election, remnant, and God's hidden purposes in history and marshaling them all into a theory of politics, society, and eschatology that could match the visions of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero.

The Enlightenment, of course, with its thoroughgoing challenge to Christian and biblical dogmas, changed all that, including (and in the context of this discussion, especially) the place of the Jews in that polity. Suddenly (as history judges these things), the Jews emerged from their ghettos, literal and figurative, into what has at times proved to be not so much the "light" as the "glare" of the Enlightenment. Yet however harsh that glare might be, at least now the Jews were, theoretically at least, full participants in the common weal of society, equals in a society of "equal justice under law."

But they emerged, as Novak well realizes, with an etiolated theory of what it all meant. No longer politically marginalized, they too had to face the challenge of the Enlightenment, but without the Augustinian resources of the Western churches. The result was that they never really decided whether to be grateful for the emancipation or resentful at the price it entailed. Yet, as Novak also realizes, the challenge to Jews to respond, however ambivalently, to the Enlightenment invitation to join in civil society as equals became unavoidable with their emancipation from the previous hegemony of Christendom. Indeed, one gets the impression from Novak's book that this challenge has still, in its fundamentals, gone unmet:

> The greater integration of Jews in the areas of political and social power in society at large, along with the new responsibilities attending to it, calls for a renewed process of ethical reflection in order to allow the normative tradition to realize its potential more fully and *begin* to operate in the world [emphasis added].

The reason for this late response should, of course, be obvious. Not only was the Enlightenment legacy from its outset a matter of hot dispute among the Jews, but as the continuing tenacity of anti-Semitism in Western society shows, ambivalence about this emancipation was not a monopoly just among its beneficiaries. So it was only as the Western world began to come to terms with the Holocaust, and especially with the birth of the state of Israel, that the terms of Jewish engagement in the modern world suddenly shifted, making a new social and political theory not just inevitable but imperative:

> In most parts of the modern world Jews are surely more active participants in larger political and social orders than the more passive resident-aliens they were in pre-Emancipation times. In the State of Israel Jews are participants in a political and social order of their own, for which they can now claim political sovereignty—although that claim is tempered in an age of increasing international dependence.

One of the features of *Jewish Social Ethics* that make it so remarkable is Novak's alertness to the blind spots that can come from this new order. For one thing, the lack of an extended tradition of political theory is itself debilitating, but he also notes the dangers of whatever meager theory seems to be developing so far. What most worries him is what he calls "the irresponsibility to one's own tradition." Orthodox Jews have been especially alert to this danger, and not merely because a thoroughgoing devotion to the Law requires close-knit neighborhoods and what Peter Berger calls a "cognitive ghetto," but more fundamentally because the Enlightenment bargain for them is Faustian in its essence—liberation at the price of tradition.

> The political and social reality of Emancipation has brought two kinds of Jewish irresponsibility, of which the Jewish thinker must be aware in order to overcome them. The first irresponsibility has been

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> the uncritical acceptance of Emancipation, especially by intellectuals enchanted by the Enlightenment, which made Emancipation possible. The more radical intellectuals, from the late 18th century on, have been so enchanted by the Enlightenment that they have been willing to see Judaism as something totally past, something totally overcome by progress: the eager rush of the present *away from* the past *into* the attraction of its own projected future. For them, the overcoming of Judaism has been a moral imperative. . . . This radical irresponsibility has called for the spiritual and cultural suicide of the Jewish people.

The name of Karl Marx does not appear in this ellipsis, but Novak has clearly described the dynamic out of which Marx could write so tormented an essay as "On the Jewish Question," or many secular Jews of the Left could view with such insouciance the anti-Semitism of Stalinist Russia, since it could easily be reinterpreted (for those who needed the reassurance of such reinterpretation) as merely an attack on the benighted forces holding back progress and not on Jews as such.

But as Novak mentions, there is also a second danger—or really a second form of the same danger—which is, the wish to justify the tradition *in terms of* the more overarching and comprehensive framework of the Enlightenment worldview. Christian theologians will recognize this strategy as the classical stance of Schleiermacher and his numerous and influential epigones. Novak, however, adopts a more "Barthian" strategy (though he might not be happy with the analogue):

> Less radical Jewish intellectuals have attempted to justify the continued existence of Jewish tradition by criteria more fundamental than itself. Although not as immediately irresponsible as the more radical advocates of spiritual and cultural suicide, their enchantment is nonetheless ultimately irresponsible to the Jewish tradition. On theological grounds, it is irresponsible to the tradition because it changes the tradition's fundamental claim to be *the* source of truth into a claim to be simply a partial source of truth in terms of some other criterion of truth itself. On ethical grounds, it is inauthentic because it insists on Jewish particularism—be it "Jewish genius" or "Jewish peoplehood"—even when the universalistic criteria it accepts call for the transcendence of such particularism. Particularism of this kind, unlike the transcendence of the general world by the singularity of the Jewish covenant *with God*, can be presented only as ethnocentricity or chauvinism [emphasis added].

This critique of ethnocentricity marks an important note throughout the book, and the author modulates it in various ways. Because it will influence some of the positions he takes in the rest of the book, his critique of what we might call a "non-transcendent particularism" merits a further look. First of all, just as he cautions Jews not to accept the Enlightenment paradigm too wholeheartedly, so too he worries aloud that the memory of the Holocaust and the single-minded focus on the state of Israel represent their own brand of moral myopia:

> To regard Jews as the only victims is to assume that Jews are a separate species and genocide is not, therefore, a human issue. But, then, was that not the logic of our murderers? . . . The responsibility of the surviving Jewish thinker is to look to the ontological foundations of Jewish ethics and law to insure that Jews themselves will not make similar misjudgments of truth and be led thereby to inauthentic moral choices of what is good. . . . Now, to many it may seem outrageous that I would even suggest that Jews are threatened with the same temptations as were those who devised our extermination. Yet I would remind such critics that in classical Jewish literature from the Bible on it was vigorously asserted that our suffering did not deprive us of our moral personality, that we are always more concerned with our own capacity to sin than with that of others, primarily because we can make only our own moral choices, not theirs.

In these remarks, the author has made his own the voice of the Hebrew prophets, but it is important to realize that they also come out of his keen analytic skill in deciphering the dilemmas that constitute being Jewish in the modern world. Indeed in his diagnosis of the pathos of both the progressive, post-Enlightenment Jew and the traditionalist response to this new phenomenon of the deracinated Jew, Novak implies that nothing will ever be resolved if the issue continues to be formulated in these jejune progressive-traditional terms:

> [The traditionalists'] antithetical reaction to the modern Jewish radicalism they rightly feared and suspected was to deny the new political and social reality and assume that they would immediately recover the authenticity of the Jewish past, a past they often romanticized, . . . [as] epitomized by the motto of the early 19th-century Hungarian rabbinical leader Moses Schreiber: "The new is prohibited by the Torah."

This strategy, of course, is impossible, a denial of the very reality of history, whose law, as Cardinal Newman once said, is "to change, [and] to be perfect is to have changed often." But more than being impossible a priori, it is itself an inherently *modern* response, all denials to the contrary notwithstanding:

> Even the desire for withdrawal from this order, which has characterized again and again a large segment of traditional Jewry, is one that must be negotiated with this new political and social order.

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> But to do this, anti-modern Jews have had to reconstitute themselves as a political and social special interest group in modern secular societies. In exchange for what they see as the religiously authentic return to the insulation of the Jewish past, they have had to adopt basically secular political and social strategies for what they perceive as their collective survival. Accordingly, in their political and social dealings, and especially in their intense economic dealings with the outside world, they have too often regarded the normative Jewish tradition as something to be protected *from* the modern world rather than as something to be brought *into* it. Therefore, they have essentially denied its governance and its guidance in major areas of their own lives. In this sense, they have been irresponsible to the concerns of the Jewish people here and now by living in the modern world, benefiting from it, and simultaneously divorcing political policy and social attitudes from being constituted by a more imaginative theological and ethical reflection on the tradition than they are willing to conduct.

Clearly the only way out of this dilemma is to go the Augustinian route and discover in the Bible the resources necessary to meet this challenge in a way that neither denies the tradition nor retreats to a cognitive ghetto of ossified and hidebound defensiveness. The times, then, are ripe for a work just of this kind! The book under review is, of course, a collection of essays, all of which, except for the Introduction, were written for various occasions and addressed to specific issues of the moment, such as care for AIDS patients, ethical issues relating to sexuality and society, technology, violence, nuclear war, etc. As in any work of this kind, the seams will show, and one should not expect of it more than it intends.

But a close reading of its arguments will alert the reader that in David Novak the Jewish community has the potential for a social and political thinker who could well advance the discussion of Jews' relationship to the modern polity in a way roughly similar to what John Courtney Murray achieved for Roman Catholics in the sixties.

This is a large claim, I realize, and its realization would require a later work from David Novak along the lines of Murray's *We Hold These Truths*: that is, a full-scale theoretical work setting out in detail all the principles that must be addressed, with an attempt to provide at least a theoretical resolution of the dilemmas that seem to be an inherent part of being Jewish in the modern world. But in the work under review we already have the initial materials for so imposing and challenging an edifice, as well as some indication of what such a theory might begin to look like.

Close readers of this important text will notice certain key features that pervade Novak's analysis and that will undoubtedly prove essential to later efforts, both his and others', to provide a viable Jewish social ethic. In the space afforded here, it is of course impossible to discuss all of these features, but there are at least three identifying traits that provide the terms of Novak's ethical analysis throughout his treatment of specific issues. They are: (1) a hostility to the deductive method, (2) a certain Niebuhrian realism, and (3) a frank openness to grounding his ethic on natural law and not on Torah and its later elaboration in *halakhah* (traditional legal reasoning).

Let us first take his hostility to mere deductivism. In a moment of real shrewdness, Novak has scored most Jewish ethicists for confusing Jewish *social* ethics with *applied* Jewish ethics, something entirely different:

> When ethical issues are raised, they assume that immediately practical answers are being sought for particular questions, and they take this as their cue to write what in effect are legal responsa. That is probably why so much of their attention has been confined to medical ethics: it is so much more case-oriented than other areas of contemporary ethics.

But it is not just the limited range of view that bothers Novak about applied ethics. Its greatest blind spot is its failure to meet the real challenge, which is to bring the vision of the covenant's validity back into the world and not merely shelter it from the world. And that is a project that is simply beyond the capacity of applied ethics to meet:

> Moreover, the method of responsa presupposes that both the questioner and the respondent are members of the same normative community, both regarding themselves as answerable to the same authority. But in the cross-cultural context of ethical (as opposed to strictly legal) discussions today, such a supposition, of course, cannot be made *at all* [emphasis added]. . . . For what is being asked of Jewish tradition today, along with other normative traditions, is guidance, not governance. The normative Jewish tradition can authentically govern only in its own house. Conversely, the error of most liberal Jewish thinkers who enter cross-cultural ethical discussions is that the normative Jewish tradition governs nowhere for them. What governs nowhere cannot offer consistent guidance anywhere.

This is, needless to say, a lesson that any number of Christian ecumenists and professional "dialoguers" I could name would be well advised to learn. In any case, it is here that Novak seems to be making his most signal contribution: in weaning Jewish discussion of ethics away from its relentless focus on *halakhah* and on to wider norms. For Novak, any vision of Jewish social ethics that involves merely a simplistic transposition of

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halakhic logic to modern situations is bound to fail, for it confuses two distinct realms of ethical reasoning:

> To confuse rules with principles is to commit a fundamental category error in ethics. Accordingly, the task of Jewish social ethics is not to deduce conclusions from the rules at hand but, rather, to perform the more imaginative intellectual task of attempting to gain insight into the principles that inform and guide the whole normative Jewish enterprise in dealing with the political and social issues. . . . When situations arise for which there are no real precedents, one cannot simply locate a single rule and deduce a conclusion from it in syllogistic fashion. . . . Justification cannot be strictly legal. Even more than the legal judgment of new hard cases, the moral judgment involved in such legislation cannot be concluded simply by deduction.

There is also Novak's refreshing sense of what I shall call his "Niebuhrian realism," that is, his alertness to the dangers of reading too much eternity into time, of discerning too much God in man, and of claiming to find too much univocal meaning in ambiguous history.

> [Promethean ethics] overestimates its own effective power in history, for it sees its task as being fulfilled by its agents themselves. By so doing it grossly inflates their capacities and continually ignores their finitude, mortality, and fallibility. It fails to recognize how tentative moral action really is. In the normative Jewish tradition, however, it is recognized that many of our practical decisions are often doubtful, and what we have to do here and now might very well be shown to be wrong at the end of history.

(It was precisely the adoption of so Promethean an ethic that compelled Marx to abjure his Jewish background so thoroughly and adopt so contorted a position on "the Jewish question." If Novak is right in his Niebuhrian reading of his tradition, normative Judaism and Marxist ethics are utterly incompatible.) "Authentic Jewish eschatology," as Novak puts it, "is an indictment of perfectionism." And, one might add, it therefore recognizes the inherent tragedy lurking behind man's ethical situation: "But Judaism's greater sobriety teaches us that frequently all we can do is the lesser evil."

It is only in his discussion of natural law that problems in his analysis start coming to the fore. Novak is of course right when he says that "only when there is a common acceptance of a 'nature' can 'natural' law be rationally persuasive," and that any natural law theory derived from Aristotle demands rethinking. It seems doubtful, however, that these assertions would be disputed by anyone today. There is something about Novak's own "rethinking" of this issue that makes the reader suspect that he has misread the tradition and will need to rethink his own position on natural law if it is to do the kind of duty he expects it to in his own proposals. This becomes particularly evident in one of the most important chapters in the book, "John Courtney Murray, S.J.: A Jewish Appraisal." In this fascinating essay, Novak lets us see some of the presuppositions of his thought that do not otherwise emerge into view in the other essays.

> Whether or not one agrees with Murray's particularly Thomist presentation of the relation between human reason and what lies beyond it, one can generally agree with him that human reason cannot sustain itself without being located in a larger context of some kind. The question is: What is that larger context if Aristotelian metaphysical nature can no longer perform that comprehensive function?

Now it is quite true that for Aristotle there was an easy transition between his physics and metaphysics, but that is far from saying that the collapse of Aristotelian cosmology has brought down, Samson-like, the whole temple of his metaphysics. Novak's description of how Aristotle's view of the universe was replaced by the overthrow of geocentrism is accurate enough, but his conclusion seems overdrawn:

> What Galileo and Newton did to make this system lose its key physical point of reference was to show that heavenly matter like earthly matter is only intelligible, not intelligent. As such, it thereby loses its exemplary status, leaving the human being as the only intelligent being whom we can identify in ordinary human experience or in any valid abstraction from it. Thus the *whole* system requires acceptance of a physical paradigm that has been consistently inoperative in physical science since the Renaissance [emphasis added].

As one reads this essay, it almost comes to seem as if Novak truly thinks that Murray actually subscribed to geocentrism, or thought the stars were perfect spheres of intelligent vibrancy, or held that God was the Self-Thinking Thought who took no care for the universe. (It is often forgotten by people who too easily tire of Thomas Aquinas' alleged "Aristotelianism" that a providential God is impossible in Aristotle's cosmology.) Now it is quite true, as Novak says, that "one of the obvious facts of modernity . . . is not that metaphysics has died (as only the Logical Positivists once thought) but that metaphysics has never again been able to display the same self-confident hegemony it once displayed when Aristotle was *the Philosopher*," but it is another thing entirely to assert that natural law theories today rely on an outdated metaphysics.

Nonetheless, let me add that as a Roman Catholic I found Novak's discussion here not just helpful but also

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fascinating. The public has of course often identified "natural law" positions in ethics with positions it sees as distinctively Roman Catholic, such as the prohibition of birth control. This has been a source of endless confusion—on both sides. But what often goes unexplored in this too-facile identification—again, by both sides—is the real difficulty that a theory based on natural law poses to a religion of revelation, and vice versa. (At least, it is a peculiarly Roman Catholic dilemma; Protestant theologians urge the point all the time.) But it is perhaps an even more painful dilemma for Judaism, which contains so much positive law that makes little sense outside of the grammar of its own religious traditions (based on revelation!). And that is precisely natural law's challenge: "It seems that the adoption of a natural law position would require the authority of God's will, as the prime authority of the halakhic system, to be subordinated to a higher order of right." Or, in other words, "a natural law doctrine seems to subordinate God to some*thing* higher."

Novak's solution to this dilemma sounds rather Thomist to this reviewer's hopelessly Roman Catholic ears, a real irony considering his critique of Murray's Thomism. But for all the irony involved, his solution is perhaps the central lesson to be drawn from this uncommonly intelligent book. In any case, the reader will not fail to notice that Novak must in fact revert, whether he will or no, to the hoary nature-grace distinction so prominent in Roman Catholic social and political ethics in order to resolve his basic dilemma of squaring revelation with natural law, and of preserving halakhic validity *inside* the Jewish community with an apostolic intent to take the insights of the Bible *out into* the world:

> Nature, constituted as the covenant's general background and horizon, is not overcome [by the covenant]. Hence, it functions as a formal criterion of judgment *within* the covenant itself and its law.

Now the author believes he can justify this (let us call it "Thomistic") stance by basing it on the traditional rabbinic distinction between Noahide "natural" law given to all mankind and Mosaic "positive" law given only to the Jews. This, by the way, is a distinction that also seems to have New Testament warrant. As Paul writes, "Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the Law, do by nature things required by the Law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the Law, since they show that the requirements of the Law are written on their hearts—their consciences also bearing witness: their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them." (Romans 2:14-15)

In his defense of natural law within his rather Barthian view of the revealed status of the Hebrew Bible, Novak also reverts to a crucial passage in the Pentateuch where Abraham challenges the Lord bluntly and directly: "Shall the Judge of the whole earth not do justice?" (Gen. 18:25) This semi-reproach by Abraham to God is startlingly reminiscent of Socrates' dialogue with the Athenian seer Euthyphro, who claimed to be doing the will of the gods in lodging a law suit against his father. To justify his behavior, this oracular priest mentions that the gods too treated their parents pretty abominably. Which prompts Socrates to wonder aloud about these tales of divine immorality. And in doing so he explicitly binds the gods to wider moral norms: "Do you think that is the reason why I am being called to trial, Euthyphro, because when I hear anyone telling stories like these about the gods, I somehow find it difficult to accept them?"

It is really quite remarkable how often Novak cites the *Euthyphro*. But while working through this volume of essays, I kept thinking of the remarks of the great Israeli historian of the Hebrew Bible, Yehezkel Kaufmann, in his book *The Religion of Israel*. One of the great virtues of Kaufmann's book is his frank admission of a problem too little noted by Novak:

> The Bible ascribes to God actions that, to our way of thinking, lack moral grounds, or even run counter to our moral sense. . . . Our moral sense is repelled by certain religious obligations and the penalties for their violation. Jephthah sacrifices his daughter to fulfill a vow, and Abraham obeys YHWH's command to sacrifice his son. Moses hangs the chiefs of the people "for YHWH" and David surrenders Saul's seven sons to a similar cruel fate to avert YHWH's wrath. . . . Ancient exegetes [including Augustine!] were troubled by many of these matters, and modern apologetes attempt in various ways to lessen their sting. . . . It is true that historical monotheism aspired to raise morality to the level of supreme law. Abandoning the amoral universe of magical forces, it conceived the idea of a moral cosmos, whose highest law is the will of God. But this idea arose out of monotheism, and not the reverse. One can discern, therefore, a primary non-moral or supra-moral element in monotheistic faiths: the will and command of God is absolutely good.

There is no question that these insights stand in a certain tension with the natural law tradition, yet if Novak or other Jewish thinkers are ever to meet the Augustinian challenge that has faced them since the Enlightenment—a challenge they have so far failed to meet in a way that is either healthy to their own tradition or does not entail hiding from the world behind the "fence built around the Torah"—something like a natural law tradition seems inevitable.

It is perhaps these unresolved ambiguities in the natural law passages that make the topical chapters of this book seem so devoid of concrete policy applications. There is something strangely bloodless, almost bromidic, about many of the chapters dealing with such issues as health care for AIDS patients, responding to vio-

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lence and crime, the capacity for wanton destruction contained in nuclear weaponry, etc. It is as if Novak is himself making a category mistake: so resolute is he not to confuse applied ethics with the theoretical underpinnings of social and political ethics that one comes away from his book with little idea of what specifically the author holds to be moral or immoral, or what specific policy recommendations he would make in the public forum.

Now it is quite true that one will look in vain for such specificity in Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* or John Rawls' *Theory of Justice*. But that in a way is the point. This is a book of twelve *topical* essays, only four of which (at most) can be considered theoretical, the rest being devoted to some of the most burning issues of our time. And whatever one may think of the theoretical speculations of Niebuhr or Murray, one was never in doubt about their position on the political and moral issues of their day, for whenever the forum was appropriate, they were forthright in making their views known. But one is hard put, for example in Novak's chapter on crime and violence, to know if the author supports capital punishment in his resident state of Virginia or not, and if so, under what circumstances. Nor is there much in the way of a discussion of the roots of so much crime (or much criticism of the romance of liberals, liberal Jews included, with the *formalities* of justice in court procedure over the *doing* of justice in meting out punishment and preserving society from the incorrigibly violent).

Or consider the chapter on the wanton destruction of nuclear war. Here Novak rightly instructs his Jewish readers about the need for them to show special sensitivity when faced with this awesome reality. But he completely finesses the question of whether and how much that horrifying prospect would change, ethically speaking, if a nation were ever to become the victim of first use—and the nature of some of the regimes working toward acquiring such weapons makes such first use not unimaginable, including some nations very much in Israel's neighborhood. In addition, one looks in vain throughout this essay for even a nodding recognition of the fact that the danger of nuclear war decreases or increases proportionally according to the kind of regime that possesses the weapons for it. (Israel bombed Iraq's reactor, not France's; and while the number of nuclear weapons in the world has not noticeably decreased in recent years, we still feel safer because of the collapse of an aggressive Soviet empire.)

All this is compounded by Novak's consistent refusal to engage the issue of deterrence head on. Admittedly, the logic of deterrence is tormenting and demands that one stare into the "black hole" of potential outcomes of apocalyptic destruction. But leaving aside the logical—not to mention moral—complexities of deterrence policy, it is nearly unimaginable that any nation with the power to do so would *in fact* not respond to a nuclear attack on one of its cities, and this quite independent of the a priori morality of such a response, which we can all discuss to our heart's content *avant le fait*. For one thing, all the talk of the immorality of bombing civilians would ring a little hollow with one or more of a nation's own cities in embers. Yet there is a vague undercurrent of admonition to Israel in this essay about this issue. But surely what is only humanly natural in the psychology of nations at large must also (and I say this without necessarily endorsing its policies in any particular area) be granted to Israel.

There has long been a tendency in both the Zionist and anti-Zionist left to hold Israel to a special norm. This is not helpful analytically, and it undercuts the first basic reality of Israel: that it is in fact a nation and not some eschatological reality set up for the admiration or contempt of the world. Beyond this, idealization of this kind is also one more example of that "politics of perfection" that Novak has criticized so well earlier. It is not that Novak himself necessarily holds Israel to a higher or different standard than other nations, but there is an undercurrent to that effect in some of his remarks, an undercurrent that never surfaces because the author tends to be so terminally vague about specifics. (That it is only an undercurrent and not an active presupposition can be seen in his essay on "Non-Jews in a Jewish Polity," where he recognizes that being one nation among others must cut both ways: "Greater Zionist commitment can indeed be developed in tandem with a rejection of the subjugation of any other people, even on moral grounds." Indeed, one would add: "*must* be developed.")

These concluding observations are critical, but they have been included only because of high hopes for what David Novak can accomplish in the future in a more consistently theoretical work. We have in him a scholar who possesses an enviable command of a wide range of literature, especially in the complexities of Jewish law. We have as well a man of humane sympathies and wide philosophical and theological interests, matched again by an admirable command of that literature, both Jewish and Christian. What results from this learning in *Jewish Social Ethics* is a struggle with ethical issues that is so penetrating, so effortlessly enriched with a wide range of reading, and handled with such finesse, that this book will prove immensely beneficial to Christians as well in their own struggle to right the balance in our increasingly demonic world. At one point Novak quotes Alasdair MacIntyre's *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* in justification of his effort to draw on the insights of John Courtney Murray. But it is a remark that can equally apply to all of Novak's non-Jewish readers as well, once they finish reading this remarkable book of essays:

> Yet the achievement of the understanding of one tradition by the adherents of another . . . in certainly rare but crucial types of cases . . . may lead to a judgment that by the standards of one's own tradition the standpoint of another tradition offers superior resources for understanding the problems and issues which confront one's own tradition. FT

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Books In Review

The Problem of Power

THE NATURE OF POLITICS: SELECTED ESSAYS OF BERTRAND DE JOUVENEL. Edited by DENNIS HALE and MARC LANDY. *Transaction. 306 pp. $21.95.*

Reviewed by **Mark C. Henrie**

THE ONLY THING deader than dead politics must surely be dead political science. It is thus remarkable to find that after several decades, these essays by Bertrand de Jouvenel (1903-1987) remain surprisingly lively. This is ironic. For Jouvenel, writing during the so-called behavioralist revolution, was an enthusiast of the idea of political *science.* Such science would be distinguished in part by its progress, rendering older work obsolete, as opposed to political *theory,* a mere "collection of individual theories which stand side by side, each one more impervious to the impact of new observations and to the advent of new theories." While political theory had been merely normative, political science would be positive. Jouvenel seems to have believed he was writing political science; it is our good fortune that in fact he was doing political theory.

This new collection of essays from Transaction Publishers provides a good introduction to a man the editors, Dennis Hale and Marc Landy, aptly call "the least famous of the great political thinkers of the twentieth century." Jouvenel's penetrating view of political realities no doubt has something to do with his personal experience, for he grew up in an intensely political environment. His father was the French ambassador to the League of Nations and was elected to the French senate; his mother presided over an important salon with a particular interest in France's relations with Czechoslovakia. Jouvenel's life and work were centrally informed by the rise of Hitler's National Socialist Party and the cataclysmic world war that followed. In some sense, the hypertrophy of the power of the State, of which the German episode is but one example, constitutes *the* political problem of our century, a problem as yet unresolved. This was Jouvenel's theme. Writing two decades after the conclusion of the Second World War, he would still note with concern that "constitutions and parliaments have to a surprising degree become mere hulks," and he would call on the liberal democracies to search for new institutional arrangements to secure liberty.

JOUVENAL'S three major works are *On Power, Sovereignty,* and *The Pure Theory of Politics.* (Only *Sovereignty* remains in print.) While Jouvenel is more a "fox" than a "hedgehog," the one phenomenon that dominates his thoughts is social mobilization. Elaborating on the critical reflections of such early-nineteenth-century thinkers as Louis de Bonald and Alexis de Tocqueville, he seeks to understand the nature of *pouvoir,* or power, at the heart of all politics. To Jouvenel, this "power" is a universal fact, a "thing"; its concrete expression in the modern world is the State, the apparatus which coalesced around monarchs in early-modern Europe. Jouvenel argues that the nature of power is such that it must always grow; it cannot do otherwise. Furthermore, power is jealous; it can only grow by eliminating competitors. If power fails to grow, it succumbs to stronger powers. Jouvenel believes this is the central dynamic of the modern world, the rise of the State to a position where it is not merely powerfully authoritative but sovereign, claiming a "legitimate" monopoly of "coercion" in a community. In its drive to sovereignty, the State has effectively disempowered competing authorities—the Church, the guilds, the family—ei-

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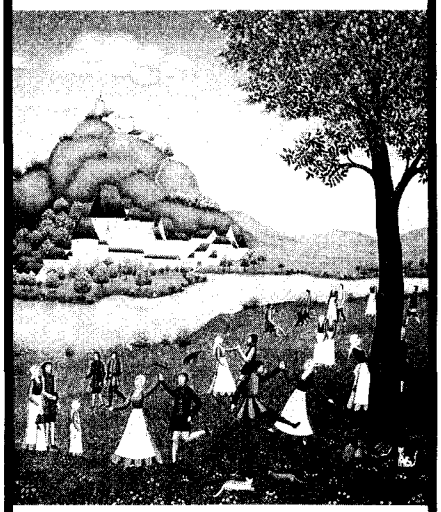

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ther directly or indirectly. We are left without any significant intermediaries between the individual and the State.

Such an account is perhaps excessively one-sided, and Jouvenel takes pains to be balanced or "scientific" in his description of the phenomenon. Social power is, after all, the result of a transaction. Individuals extend "credit" to a power; their compliance is "voluntary." To receive credit, a power must provide something in return. This reciprocity, Jouvenel believes, has resulted in the welfare state. Only such massive benefits could legitimize the demands that the State has made of its citizens in our century. For as Angelo Codevilla has recently suggested, with taxation in European countries standing at about 50 percent of income, the modern State's exaction of tribute from its people is "comparable only to what the most rapacious empires of antiquity exacted from slaves." It is because the State does so much for us that we do not think ourselves enslaved. But Jouvenel draws our attention to the fact that in these transactions, ultimately, someone commands and others obey. The more the commanding voice becomes unitary, the farther we stray from the promise of limited, constitutional government.

OF COURSE WE may object that in democratic regimes where "the people rule" we obey no one but ourselves, and thus we are free. Jouvenel, however, strongly objects to this notion of popular sovereignty. He states boldly, "To identify those who govern with the people is to confuse the issue, and no regime exists in which such an identification is possible. . . . Those who govern are neither the people nor the majority: they are the governors." This is especially true of the modern State, with its standing army of civil servants—in Jouvenel's coinage, "the Agentry"—in no direct way responsible to the people. The achievement of constitutional government was not to establish popular sovereignty; rather, it was to delegate representatives of the people, a parliament, to resist the power of the king. For Jouvenel, the parliamentary function is a negative one, best exemplified in the Roman Tribunate, which could only arrest the action of the Senate and the Consuls, in the name of the people: what was essential was that "the people were defended by those who did not aspire to become masters."

In modern parliamentary systems, however, there is no longer a salutary struggle between the king and parliament. Indeed, what Americans would call the executive power is now exercised by the members of the representative chamber themselves. Here, the parliament serves as no resistance to power, but rather acts to mobilize the public behind the commands of these governors. Jouvenel's ominous example of the structural failure of parliamentary systems to offer resistance is the National Socialist Party's control of the Reichstag. He concludes that governors and representatives must be understood to play different roles. "Government cannot, without dereliction of duty, be itself representative; it is only the regime [as a whole], not the government, which can be representative." The way to undermine constitutional government, then, is not "to deny representation, which the people would defend; it is to absorb representation in[to] government," into power. This has occurred in the Western democracies in this century. In thus "achieving" popular sovereignty, Jouvenel believes we have eliminated any place to stand in order to resist power.

To Americans it may seem that the U.S. Constitution, which divides the powers of government among separately chosen branches, avoids Jouvenel's critique. There is something to this, and Jouvenel himself nicely observes that L'Enfant designed the city of Washington in such a way as to locate the White House and the Capitol on rival hilltops, signifying the healthy rivalry between our "king" and our "parliament." Yet America has not wholly avoided the dangers that exercise Jouvenel. For one of our greatest bulwarks against a monopoly of power at the center has been entirely eliminated: namely, the competing power of the sovereign states of the union. And the idea of refashioning the American regime into a disciplined parliamentary system—because we need to "get things done"—has been the goal of political scientists in the progressive tradition at least since Woodrow Wilson. Indeed, the notion that "divided government" (when one party controls the Presidency while the other controls Congress) constitutes a "problem" nicely demonstrates our misunderstanding of the preconditions of freedom in a constitutional republic.

WHILE JOUVENAL'S personal political loyalties are difficult to categorize, his works when originally published were most warmly received by conservatives. Today his essays present a particular challenge for that promising group of thinkers called communitarians. The communitarians share Jouvenel's concern about the erosion of intermediate associations in the liberal State. Conversely, Jouvenel focuses on the utility of civic friendship as a basis for resistance to State power. But Jouvenel finds it necessary to embrace measures that most communitarians seem to wish to avoid.

The communitarians have sought to position themselves between "libertarians" and "authoritarians." Libertarians are those who want to pursue their individual economic activities or "lifestyle" choices without any political or social constraints. Jouvenel would argue that, to some extent, it is by its responsiveness to the libertarian impulse that the State achieved its sovereignty at the expense of other social groups. Authoritarians, it seems, are those who would like to revivify not simply the fellow-feeling of concrete associations, but indeed, the power or the authority of those communities. Such talk of authority most communitarians find distasteful. But in Jouvenel's political science, a community exists only if a power resides within it; this is an inescapable social fact. Furthermore, as we have seen, only power can oppose power,

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only an authority can compete with the state's monopoly of authority. To lament the growing totalism of the liberal State while refusing to countenance the resuscitation of intermediate powers represents the current communitarian evasion of responsibility.

Thus, Jouvenel argues, friends of liberty today have only two options open to them. They can acquiesce in the ever-growing power of the State, and attempt to structure it so that it cannot become an instrument of domination. This, however, is a difficult project, perhaps a futile one. Consider, for example, the attempt to formulate school voucher legislation that will foreclose the possibility of eventual State control of private and parochial schools. Nothing has yet eluded the *control* that comes with federal "help." Jouvenel's more practical alternative, therefore, is "to combat to the utmost the extension of state power." This is best effected by "defend[ing] in principle every form of private power, whatever it may be . . . as a refuge. Whatever the vices of 'the other Power,' it has the virtue of being 'other.'" Until the communitarians are willing to broach the question of the power or authority of social groups, they will not really have addressed the true nature of politics.

Jonathan Edwards & the Public Square

ONE HOLY AND HAPPY SOCIETY: THE PUBLIC THEOLOGY OF JONATHAN EDWARDS. By GERALD R. MCDERMOTT. *Pennsylvania State University Press. 203 pp. $29.95.*

Reviewed by **Mark A. Noll**

GERALD MCDERMOTT, who teaches religion at Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia, has written a persuasive revisionist account of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) and public life. The standard picture that has been passed along by some of the great figures in twentieth-century history writing (including Perry Miller and H. Richard Niebuhr) is that Jonathan Edwards was largely apolitical. McDermott shows, by contrast, that Edwards regularly commented on public events and, moreover, that he did so with at least some of the same genius as is present in his more narrowly religious work.

Apart from the great care McDermott devotes to the published record, the book achieves its useful results the old-fashioned way—by assiduously pursuing the non-published sources for Edwards' career. Edwards, it turns out, left substantial evidence concerning his social

MARK A. NOLL, *a frequent contributor to* FIRST THINGS, *is author most recently of* A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada *(Eerdmans).*

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views in notebooks, letters, and, above all, a substantial cache of unpublished sermon manuscripts, like those delivered during the two wars of Edwards' adult lifetime in which New England joined Britain in combat against France. Although some of McDermott's conclusions are preliminary, his book represents one of the fullest examples to date of the fruit to be harvested from patient attention to the private, as well as published, Edwards.

An aside is appropriate at this point to note how much McDermott benefits from the boom in the study of Edwards that has been racing ahead full blast for nearly half a century. Pioneering labor in the 1930s and 40s by Perry Miller, Richard Niebuhr, and others whom McDermott and a generation of younger colleagues are now revising stirred the modern interest in Edwards, whose theocentric Calvinism had made him an anachronism during the heady days of Progressive expansionism from the Civil War to the 1930s. During the past half-century, however, the disruptions of Western society undermined the tendency to patronize earlier theological realists, and Edwards' multifaceted genius at last received its due. The splendid Yale edition of Edwards' works (now advertising the tenth substantial volume in its series—the first printing ever of Edwards' early sermons from 1720 to 1723) has been the most visible fruit of the Edwards revival. Some taking part in this revival are most interested in Edwards' aesthetic instincts, some in the clarity of his moral reasoning, some in his innovative metaphysics, some for his attention to the psyche, and some for his sublime Calvinist theology. And Gerald McDermott, who attends to several of the dimensions of Edwards' great mind, is in a particularly good position to bring the significance of Edwards into the present.

THE SPECIAL VALUE of McDermott's work, then, is his illustration of how deeply Edwards did in fact concern himself with politics, economics, and social issues. Earlier interpreters had not merely described Edwards as apolitical, they had also contended that he contributed indirectly to the rising American messianism that would climax during the Revolutionary era—when many ministers claimed, in the words of a Pennsylvania Presbyterian, that "the cause of America is the cause of Christ." Edwards supposedly contributed to that process by using New England's hereditary covenant theology as a way of congratulating the colonies for their special status with God and by proposing that the millennium would begin in New England as a result of the eighteenth-century Great Awakening.

McDermott persuasively tells another story. For Edwards, covenant theology functioned not so much to give America special privileges, but to call for extra duties. McDermott shows beyond reasonable doubt that Edwards' millennialism was a universal concept only incidentally related to New England. By employing the work of Sang Lee on Edwards' philosophical theology, McDermott traces Edwards' social ethics back to his more basic understanding of God and the world: God had ordained economic, social, and political life; he sustained this sphere of existence by his constant Providence; but he also subordinated the virtues of public life to the virtues of "true religion." McDermott also demonstrates that Edwards applied a modified form of "country" ideology to warn magistrates of the corruptions of power and to encourage citizens to perform their public duties faithfully, as unto God.

McDermott is especially convincing on the question of Edwards' relation to the American Revolution. Against those who read a straight path from Edwards' depiction of the Christian's warfare against spiritual tyranny to the patriots' struggle against the "tyranny" of Parliament, McDermott has a more nuanced conclusion. Edwards, though a traditional hierarchialist with respect to the duties of magistrates and citizens, was nevertheless a spiritual egalitarian. He held that all people stood equally alike before God in their need to repent; that women, children, slaves, and the poor were special objects of divine love because of their status as "the least of these my brethren"; and that, according to McDermott's careful distinction, although Christianity in its essence had to be "private," it could never be "privatized" and remain true to its character.

It was by means of this theology—rather than through visionary millennialism or a self-congratulating covenant theology—that Jonathan Edwards may have contributed to the revolution in heart that John Adams perceived behind the American War for Independence. But such a contribution would have been indirect rather than overt. In addition, as McDermott points out, the application of Edwardsean theological categories to American political *events* was not nearly as important to Edwards as the application of redeemed life to the day-to-day *structures* of social, economic, and political life.

THE BOOK HAS other virtues that can only be mentioned briefly. McDermott successfully brings his conclusions about Edwards to bear on the complexities of the contemporary discussions of "republicanism." He is equally skillful at rendering the relation between Edwards' theology and the theologies of his contemporaries. Moreover, although McDermott is clearly partisan about his subject, he does honestly deal with the limitations of Edwards' thought (e.g., his animus against the Roman Catholic Church was so strong that he regularly concluded he was witnessing the Church's collapse when he was merely projecting his own ideological hopes onto the screen of contemporary events). McDermott is also not afraid to spotlight certain weaknesses of Edwards' character (such as that he could be overbearing and almost suffocatingly self-righteous).

In the end, however, it is not Edwards' blemishes but his substantial contributions as a public theologian that mean the most. McDermott,

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through his assiduous work in unpublished sources, has rescued from historical oblivion a powerful set of theological observations on public duty. He has also provided much food for thought for those in the present who, with Jonathan Edwards, seek two things: a private faith uncontaminated by the perilous allure of public power, and a private faith honorably committed to the God-ordained purposes of public life.

A Modern Pilgrim's Progress

SAINTS & SINNERS: WALTER RAILEY, JIMMY SWAGGART, MADALYN MURRAY O'HAIR, ANTON LEVAY, WILL CAMPBELL, MATTHEW FOX. By LAWRENCE WRIGHT. *Knopf. 266 pp. $24.*

Reviewed by **Matthew Scully**

LAWRENCE WRIGHT'S memoir of a few years ago, *In the New World: Growing Up With America, 1960-1984*, was billed as "a biography of the Baby Boom generation," the familiar story of political awakening amid the traumas of assassination, Vietnam, Watergate, etc. Here we have a spiritual sequel—the account of a discontented baby boomer's search for larger things.

An essayist for *Rolling Stone* and a self-described "rationalist," Mr. Wright's idea is to come to terms with religion through an intimate study of six spiritually minded people, to attempt to "try on" their various faiths. "As a genre," he writes, "the book presents itself as a travel adventure, in which the protagonist enters foreign territory in order to discover something valuable about himself; the only distinction here is that the traveller is moving through regions of belief rather than culture. . . . My object was not just to see the sights but to change—to enlarge—myself. This is the chronicle of my search for faith."

As earnest as this search might be, a reader attempting to follow along encounters two obstacles. The first is the slightly sappy quality evident above, a weakness for melodrama that casts doubt on Mr. Wright's credentials as a level-headed rationalist. The second is his way of intruding into the narrative, so that we may not only observe the people he's interviewing but watch in wonder as the author is "enlarged."

Nor does it inspire much confidence in our guide to note the superior air with which he recalls the "snooty, pious, and sanctimonious" Christians of his childhood in Dallas—which seems a pretty snooty, pious, and sanctimonious remark itself. These folks he has now come to view "with a mixture of envy and pity." Envy, because their "delusions" at least afford them solace unknown to the author; pity, because

MATTHEW SCULLY *was formerly Literary Editor of* National Review *and a speechwriter for Vice President Dan Quayle.*

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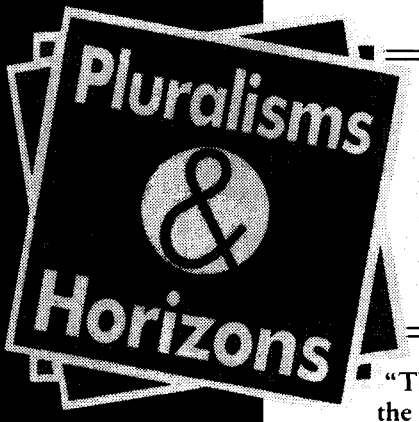

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their narrow-mindedness so often leads to "pointless guilt trips."

ONLY A MAN undergoing "enlargement" could show so little humility. It seems not to occur to Mr. Wright that a sneer is perhaps not the best starting point for a spiritual journey. Regarding with pity those superstitious types he has since outgrown, he fails to notice that, whatever their faults, they undertook a journey of faith long before he himself got around to it. His religious quest, like his generation's storied political struggles, begins with a summary dismissal of the experiences and insights of previous generations—which have little or nothing to teach rationalists like himself. His is a generation of "guides," not mere followers.

But as the "New Age" movement attests, when a sixties worldling sets out to seek the divine he tends to gravitate instead toward the strange, the novel, the guilt-free, the carnal and titillating. So in the first two chapters we examine the lives of Dallas minister Walker Railey, whose disgrace in sexual scandal proves that "the pursuit of goodness is a treacherous path," and Jimmy Swaggart, another "overreaching preacher outdone by his carnal nature"—two spiritual straw men embodying the "hypocrisy" of traditional Christianity. Here our itinerary includes a visit to the motel room where Swaggart entertained his ladies—the better to understand how in the search for faith "one may discover at the end not enlightenment but the dark side of oneself."

At the end of the book, safely removed from these "sinners," we meet the "saints": a liberal-minded preacher named Will Campbell, whose defiance of narrow theological "categories" and institutions appeals to Mr. Wright; and Father Matthew Fox, a Roman Catholic media hound who has just been suspended by the Dominican order.

In between these groups, Mr. Wright profiles Satanist Anton LeVay and professional atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair. (Where in this sternly empirical study of Faith, one wonders, are the ordinary faithful?) "I wanted to look closely at the places in life that society had declared off-limits," Mr. Wright explains. "In this manner, I identify with LeVay—in fact, it was my own interest in the forbidden that had drawn me to him in the first place." People like LeVay and O'Hair are not simply to be dismissed. Consider, after all, "the moral courage required to explore the dark, uncertain territories of the human spirit that we name atheism and Satanism. To my way of thinking, there is a certain saintliness involved in carrying so much hatred directed at them from people who are unwilling to accept these archetypal aspects of themselves."

If not exactly "saintly" in any rational sense, LeVay does make an interesting study, and Mr. Wright in the end does an effective job exposing his theatrics and his fabricated past. In fact, he pretty much dismisses LeVay as a charming fraud. But what's all this brooding about "archetypes," the "moral courage" of the depraved, and the "uncertain territories of the human spirit"? It was "an interest in the forbidden" that landed Railey and Swaggart in their fix, and one doubts that either of them would claim credit for moral courage. To that extent, they are wiser men than Mr. Wright, who mistakes boldness for courage and thus can't quite shake the idea that sin carries a certain dark glamour—a sophisticated view widely endorsed by thieves, drug dealers, adulterers, pornographers, and others brave enough to defy their conventional archetypes and explore those "uncertain territories of the human spirit."

At each stop in the tour our guide offers us his penetrating insights. Man, it turns out, has a carnal nature. And "behind the mask of holiness" even the believer can be "all too human." Sometimes people are hypocrites. And suffering occasionally makes people question their faith.

It is no doubt to his credit that Mr. Wright came to grasp these truths, and perhaps in *Rolling Stone* all this passes for probing reflection. What grates is the tiresome pretense of sophistication, the air of bold originality as Mr. Wright "discovers" theological truisms he might have learned in Sunday School.

"I suppose that early on in my life," he broods, "I felt a need to choose between my allegiance to the worldview of reason, knowledge, and experience . . . and that of faith. It's religion I can't handle. I just can't surrender, I can't give up my integrity even if it were possible to have a larger experience. It's just not me. I can't make this leap of faith."

And yet reason itself turns out to be the missing partner in this rationalist's search, for he never does pause to ask the fundamental religious question: "Does God exist and can we know Him?" It might even be that faith and reason are compatible after all, as some pretty enlarged types like Socrates, Aquinas, Milton, Pascal, and (in our time) C. S. Lewis and Mortimer Adler have concluded. The whole Reason-versus-Faith conflict is just lazily assumed, setting up Mr. Wright's posture as brave freethinker venturing into the frontiers of unreason.

JUST HOW GULLIBLE our Man of Reason can be becomes clear in the final chapter, where Mr. Wright is played for a sap by Fr. Fox. An old fool of the New Age, Fr. Fox has brought attention to himself over the years by theorizing that Jesus was a widower and Paul a homosexual, by regularly referring to God as "She," and by hiring a Zen master and a witch named "Starhawk" to aid in his San Francisco-based ministry. His widely published disputes with the Church hierarchy have made him a "theological superstar." In his struggles with Cardinal Ratzinger and other backward types in the Church, particularly in their intolerance of abortion and homosexuality, "Matt" speaks for Christians "searching for some new way of fitting religion into their lives." Matt, indeed, would dispense with the whole "fall/redemption model" in favor of his own "creation-centered

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model," a Christianity of crystals instead of crosses whose Swingin' Savior shrugs off sin and asks only that we all "get in touch with our joy."

True, Mr. Wright does pause to wonder vaguely who would give a hang what Matt thought about anything without the "Father" before his name, without the moral authority of the Church whose moral authority he challenges. But instead of making for Rome to interview Ratzinger—if not a "theological superstar," at least a genuine believer who might have made for a good chapter—our guide gazes longingly into the crystals. In the final pages, we are offered a glimpse of priest and pilgrim burrowing—buck naked—into a "sweat lodge" full of burning coals, an ancient Indian prayer ritual from which both Larry and Matt emerge feeling somehow renewed, and fully in touch with their joy.

Our journey, then, turns out to be one long, tedious evasion, a quest for the new and relevant meandering back to the dreariest elements of paganism. Nor, in the end, is our guide's problem really a lack of faith; it's an excess of faith. Never seriously doubting his own disbelief, he makes "Reason," "Independence," and "Intellectual Integrity" his unchallenged dogmas, and, seeking enlargement, winds up more cramped than ever within the confines of his own ego.

Beyond the Mainline Tale

THE CHURCHING OF AMERICA, 1776-1990: WINNERS AND LOSERS IN OUR RELIGIOUS ECONOMY. By ROGER FINKE and RODNEY STARK. *Rutgers University Press. 325 pp. $22.95.*

Reviewed by **Walter Sundberg**

IN MAINLINE theological schools, divinity students are told a familiar tale about the church in modernity that goes something like this: The present age is "secular" or "post-Christian" and the church is in decline. In order to be responsible, Christians must get used to their straitened circumstances as a community in "exodus." Theologically, they must accommodate to modernity by making Christian proclamation compatible with a scientific worldview so that faith can be acceptable to its "cultured despisers." The primary means of accommodation is historical-critical method in biblical scholarship. Modern church history is the story of the triumph of this method. With the exception of retrograde movements of Yahoo Evangelicalism (e.g., Fundamentalism and Pentecostalism), whose existence is confined to the periphery of civilized life, the success of the critical method is assured. Inherited denominational differences among churches are of little importance to the modern church. Ecumenism is an urgent task because only the reunification of churches can effectively answer the challenge of modern pluralism. The World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches, and various interdenominational dialogues represent the future of Christianity. To be true to the Lord, the church must not only be ecumenical, it must also be a witness for peace and justice ("peace and justice" all too often translating into anti-American, anti-capitalist social policy).

Although steeped in pessimism, this Mainline Tale about the church in modernity is curiously comforting to declining denominations. It rationalizes, in an intellectually elegant fashion, what they believe to be the inevitability of their failure.

IN RECENT YEARS, however, the Mainline Tale has been subject to attack from many quarters. Critics are scrutinizing historical method in biblical scholarship for the religious hostility of its philosophical underpinnings. The ecumenical juggernaut appears to be foundering because of its chronic inability to appreciate the persistence of doctrinal differences and its failure to appeal beyond elite ecclesiastics. The peace-and-justice crowd continues to reel from the collapse of Communism. But perhaps the most fascinating impetus for revision of the Mainline Tale has come from the clear-eyed reassessment of Evangelicalism and its role in American church history.

Twenty-one years ago, Dean Kelley began this reassessment in *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*. Evangelical denominations, said Kelley, are not at the periphery, but at the center, of American religious life. They are growing while the Mainline is declining. Dogmatic in belief, strict in behavior, refusing to accommodate, they successfully carry out the indispensable function of religion: to explain the meaning of life in ultimate terms. In the early 1980s, a new generation of Evangelical scholars, George Marsden eminent among them, challenged the stereotype of Fundamentalism as intellectually vacuous and out of sync with dominant trends in American culture. By the end of the decade, Nathan O. Hatch was arguing that the democratic and populist orien-

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tation of evangelical denominations is nothing less than "the driving force behind American Christianity."

The latest salvo has been fired by two sociologists of impeccable credentials: Roger Finke and Rodney Stark. In a vigorously polemical essay filled with useful statistics, Finke and Stark turn the Mainline Tale upside down. Their book is a delight to read for many reasons, not the least of which is their employment of a wonderful array of in-your-face metaphors taken from the world of free-market capitalism and their serious questioning of such accepted authorities as Sidney Ahlstrom, Martin Marty, and Winthrop Hudson.

The story of American Christianity, assert the authors, is the triumph of upstart sectarian groups, primarily Methodists and Baptists, over historic "established" denominations: Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians. Whereas established denominations had a "market share" of religious "adherents" (a concept that adjusts membership for children) of 55 percent in 1776, this share was reduced to 19 percent by 1850. By contrast, the market share of Methodists and Baptists had risen from 19 percent to 55 percent by 1850. This dramatic reversal took place at a time when the U.S. population was growing by leaps and bounds—from approximately three million in 1776 to over twenty-three million in 1850—and the number of "churched" Christians rose by 20 percent. The phenomenon of sectarian growth remains a constant feature of the American religious landscape. Between 1960 and 1970, for example, the Assemblies of God grew by 23 percent. They now have 500,000 more members than the United Church of Christ and are within hailing distance of faltering Episcopalians and Presbyterians.

THE TRIUMPH OF Evangelicalism has been the most important factor in what Finke and Stark call "the churching of America." Drawing on a wealth of data, including neglected statistics of the Census Bureau, Finke and Stark show that Americans have become adherents of Christian congregations at an increasing rate: from 17 percent of the American population on the eve of the Revolution, to 37 percent at the start of the Civil War, to 56 percent before the onset of the Depression, to 62 percent by the year of Ronald Reagan's election. Not secularization but Christianization is the primary religious fact of American life. No other industrialized nation of the West displays such a pattern. On the contrary, the story of Christianity in Europe is a sad account of the marginalization of "monopolistic" territorial religions. Despite the sophistication of their theology and the hoary prestige of their ecclesiastical orders, the European churches have failed to market their "product." In modernity, monopoly is as bad for church growth as it is for a commercial economy. By the same token, pluralism in religious choice encourages the emergence of healthy religious movements.

What characteristics make for success in America's religious market? Like Hatch, Finke and Stark argue that it is the ability of religious groups to enter deeply into the democratic and populist impulses of American culture. The meta-doctrine of Evangelicalism (discovered by Ernst Troeltsch long ago) is the teaching that the normal beginning of genuine Christian life is spiritual transformation. The particular theological orientation that underlies this meta-doctrine may differ among evangelical sects. Some, like the old Puritans, draw on the orthodox Protestant distinction between "historical" and "saving" faith; others emphasize an Arminian anthropology of free choice; still others speak of regeneration through an "anointing" of the Holy Spirit. Whatever the basis, all Evangelicals preach adult conversion. They consistently challenge Americans to take responsibility for their lives in practical, moral terms. They eschew high culture, elite education, ritualized worship, hierarchical organization, and a professionalized clergy undergirded by formal authority.

EVANGELICALS HAVE been able to capture the imagination of ordinary people and provide them with a concrete understanding of the transcendent in daily existence. They inculcate temperance, frugality, a passion for holiness, the sanctity of family life, and self-esteem. Above all, they deliver intact across the generations the fundamental truth of salvation through Christ alone; and they do so in spite of the alluring blandishments of worldly culture. Theirs is a theology meant to capture the Common Man. Surveying the American past with Evangelicals as their focus, Finke and Stark discover the same "law" of American church history that Kelley did two decades ago: "To the degree that denominations rejected traditional doctrines and ceased to make serious demands on their followers, they ceased to prosper."

Among the most instructive chapters of the book are a candid account of the transformation of Methodism into an "established" church after the Civil War, which led to its decline; a convincing explanation of the ability of Southern Baptists to avoid the fate of the Methodists; and an absolutely brilliant portrayal of the ways in which Roman Catholicism, out of the rich resources of its complex heritage, adapted evangelical characteristics in the crucial period of its growth from 1850 to 1926. Catholics were able to "church" successive waves of immigrants from abroad, many of whom were alienated from their Christian roots in Europe. It is an inspiring story.

I belong to a mainline denomination, one of whose leaders loves to travel to Sweden because he believes that there he gains an ecumenical vision of what he has called "mature" Christianity. Swedish Lutheranism draws less than 3 percent of the populace into the sanctuary on any given Sunday. Yet many of us are still mesmerized by the Mainline Tale. Reading Finke and Stark is the best way I know to break the spell. Their book may not turn card-carrying members of mainline denomi-

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nations into Evangelicals, but it might begin to make them "wise as serpents."

BRIEFLY NOTED

THE CHURCH AND THE LEFT. By ADAM MICHNIK. Edited, translated, and with an Introduction by DAVID OST. *University of Chicago Press. 301 pp. $24.95.*

First published in Paris in 1977 and smuggled back into Poland as *samizdat,* Adam Michnik's *Church, Left, Dialogue* (the book's original title) was a crucial contribution to the rapprochement between Poland's traditionally anticlerical intelligentsia and the Catholic Church: a reconciliation that would pay rich dividends during the formation of Solidarity and its struggle for survival under martial law, and in the triumph of the democratic resistance in 1989. Michnik, an historian from a secular (indeed, Communist) Jewish background, was also one of the most prescient analysts of the seismic impact of Pope John Paul II's pilgrimage to his homeland in 1979, describing it as a great "lesson in dignity" and a clarion call to "shun those dishonorable ways" by which people compromised with the Communist culture of the lie. And for all that he has become a vocal critic of several aspects of the Church's public role since 1989, Michnik's brilliant evocation of the anti-culture of totalitarianism and his analysis of the Church's distinctive contribution to the reconstruction of civil society in Communist-occupied Poland remain worth reading. The same cannot be said, alas, of David Ost's "Introduction," a nasty piece of ideological spin-doctoring, some of whose caricatures would be risible were they not so wrongheaded. Ost, for example, describes the Solidarity theologian Josef Tischner as an exponent of "Catholic fundamentalism"; what would we think of a Polish analyst of the American Catholic scene who dismissed Father Avery Dulles in those terms? (Answer: We would think him ill-informed, *meshugge,* or malicious.) The Polish Church, now in the midst of a fascinating and wide-ranging debate over its role(s) in democratic Poland, deserves better than this.

—George Weigel

A TIME FOR HEALING: AMERICAN JEWRY SINCE WORLD WAR II. By EDWARD S. SHAPIRO. *Johns Hopkins University Press. 313 pp. $29.95.*

The fifth and final volume in "The Jewish People in America" series, *A Time for Healing* is a lucid overview of recent Jewish history in the United States, covering, among other topics, the dwindling of anti-Semitism after 1945 (it peaked during the Depression and World War II), the development of American Jewish institutions, the fulfillment of the promise of social mobility, changing settlement and demographic patterns, the impact of feminism, and the evolution of religious practice. One of the most interesting sections is Chapter 6, "Judaism, American Style," a concise and perceptive analysis of the unexpected reemergence of Orthodoxy, the decline of the Conservative movement, and the growth of Reform Judaism as it has moved to the right and the left simultaneously. While celebrating the material and professional success of Israel in America, the author is uneasy about the degraded quality of Jewish *religious* life here. He is pessimistic about assimilation but still manages to conclude with a guarded optimism that echoes the sociologist Marshall Sklare: "Jews have survived one crisis after another, and perhaps they will also survive the freedom and prosperity of America."

UNDUE PROCESS: A STORY OF HOW POLITICAL DIFFERENCES ARE TURNED INTO CRIMES. By ELLIOTT ABRAMS. *Free Press. 243 pp. $22.95.*

Whatever Americans think of Iran/Contra, Oliver North, or Ronald Reagan's Latin American policies, they should be outraged over this book's harrowing description of the criminal prosecution of an honorable public servant for the legitimate performance of his duties. Elliott Abrams, former Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, found himself the target of prosecution by Judge Lawrence Walsh just prior to the expiration of the statute of limitations. The author offers a daily chronicle of his tribulations. It is a candid account that provides amazing insight into the mind of a wrongly persecuted individual. Abrams also describes the impact of this traumatic event on his wife and three children. The legal terror stems from a vindictive Congress allowing uncontrolled lawyers with unlimited time, money, and egos intent on securing a big name prosecution to make their reputation. The moral integrity of the justice system in America is clearly undermined by an approach that first selects the hapless victim to be prosecuted, and then picks the crimes with which to charge him. Many have wondered about the millions squandered on futile prosecutorial efforts. This powerful book will enrage the reader with the attempts by Walsh and his cronies to criminalize the conduct of foreign policy.

—Fritz Heinzen

MODERN FASCISM: LIQUIDATING THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW. By GENE EDWARD VIETH. *Concordia. 187 pp. $15.95 paper.*

The author's contention is that fascism as a "particular mode of tyranny" did not die with the destruction of the axis powers in World War II—that fascism remains a temptation as long as certain cultural and intellectual tendencies have force in the modern world. These tendencies include: social alienation seeking to recover primitive harmonies with the community and with nature; anti-intellectual romanticism and vitalism; idolization of a "folk" or nation; an embrace of eugenics, euthanasia, and abortion; moral relativism culminating in nihilism and the will to power. Such habits of mind, the author suggests,

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are now more common on the left than on the right, though traditional right-left dichotomy breaks down under the analysis here. This brief book does not provide an account of the concrete political circumstances that might lead to a recrudescence of fascism, but it does an excellent job of explaining modern fascism as a kind of neopagan impulse that seeks to reverse the civilizing effects of Christianity and Judaism. The radical character of modern paganism/fascism serves, unwittingly, to demonstrate that these two faiths, though historically at odds, possess a high degree of moral and intellectual compatibility. Indeed, the author argues convincingly, the Nazi campaign of extermination against the Jews was not merely an extreme instance of ethnic, religious, or racial hatred, but part of a broad attack against God, the idea of transcendence, and the moral and religious order.

A JEWISH CONSERVATIVE LOOKS AT PAGAN AMERICA. By DON FEDER. *Huntington House. 238 pp. $19.99 cloth, $9.99 paper.*

The corruption of American culture and morals as seen by Don Feder, editorial writer for the *Boston Herald* and nationally syndicated newspaper columnist. The book is a collection of Feder's recent articles and speeches on such topics as the breakdown of the family, the loss of traditional religious faith, the epidemic of sexual license (including pornography and homosexuality), the rise of feminism, abortion, divorce, drugs, crime, and "new age" religions and cults. A highly readable survey of the issues constituting our current "culture wars," with a slant that is sometimes specifically Jewish but mainly Judeo-Christian in the broadest sense.

For Duns Scotus

Under the dome-sky oneness
translucent and unincarnate as thought,
blank as unburnt light,
the hope of thisness chokes in nebulae
of beetles,
sand grains,
hydrogen atoms.

Gnosis blurs,
pits the achilded One
against the unfathered Many.
Asks, "Who could hear each song
in the All Song?"

Yet the high sun has lanced down.
He washes each square inch of earth
with clear sight,
rays through needle's eye,
kindles motes with all-fire,
searches out my pupil
and graces even me
with light.

Mark P. Shea

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THE PUBLIC SQUARE

A Continuing Survey of Religion and Public Life

Richard John Neuhaus

A Word on "The Competition"

So it has come to this. Fifty-two years ago, the great Reinhold Niebuhr and a few associates launched *Christianity & Crisis* in order to counter what they viewed as the liberal sentimentalism of American Protestantism, a sentimentalism that was unwilling or unable to face up to the crises of the time, notably the threat of Hitler and his minions. Against such sentimentalism, *C&C* became the voice of "Christian realism." Since successor generations must do something to keep themselves busy, many revisionist critiques of Christian realism have been produced. But the fact is—or at least our firm judgment is—that on most of the great issues of that time, *C&C* was right and its critics were usually wrong.

Then came the sixties. In Niebuhr's last failing years, when he had withdrawn from editing, and after his death in 1971, C&C veered, along with the herd of progressive minds, sharply to the left. In latter years it became, and boasted of becoming, the religious counterpart to *The Nation*. Apparently many people decided they could take *The Nation* straight, without the chaser of *C&C*'s occasional biblical footnotes. Circulation plummeted and influence became imperceptible. Now comes notice that *C&C* is shutting down. We say, without a scintilla of *Schadenfreude*, that we are very sorry. The magazine inherited, even if it finally betrayed, a noble tradition.

The question is asked how First Things views its "competition." The question is not easy to answer. Ours is a journal of "religion and public life," and we take both with great seriousness, indeed contending that the first is the heart of the second. Among publications identified as "religious," the pickings today are, quite frankly, pretty slim. The Protestant front is spanned by *The Christian Century* and *Christianity Today*. The first, more than a century old, is still the reliable flagship of oldline Protestantism, reflecting that sector's strengths and weaknesses, and offering from time to time articles that dissent from the liberalism against which Niebuhr initially posed *C&C*. The *Century*'s liberalism is certainly less sentimental and less strident than it was fifty years ago. While its readership is almost entirely liberal Protestant and its subscription base is in libraries that have long taken it to fill the "Protestant" category among periodicals, the *Century* is still a standard, albeit declining, referent in journalistic stories about religion in America. (Largely, no doubt, because of the association of the infinitely quotable senior editor, Martin E. Marty.)

Christianity Today is of much larger circulation, pitched to a more popular audience, and serves as a kind of marketing catalogue for evangelical Protestants, who constitute almost all of its readership. It is some way from what Carl Henry had in mind when he began it as a journal to provide a serious intellectual and theological forum for Evangelicals, but it serves an important purpose and offers a superior news service on happenings evangelical.

Among Catholic publications, *America*, *Commonweal*, *National Catholic Reporter*, *National Catholic Register*, and *Crisis* must be mentioned. Jesuit-edited *America* has a secure circulation base in Catholic institutional networks and is edited in a laid-back, eclectic manner around the general theme question, "Wouldn't it have been nice if Vatican Council II had been implemented?" While cranky about this pontificate and Rome in general, *America* is by no means to be confused with the *National Catholic Reporter*'s rantings. The latter might well be described as *The Nation* of American Catholicism. The other *NCR*, the *Register*, is sober, reliable, prone to the pietistic, and too often dull. But it does supply a very useful overview of what is going on within the worlds of Catholicism.

"*Commonweal* Catholic" was a term of great panache twenty-five and more years ago. Very consciously lay-edited, it represented the avant garde of responsible reform. Perhaps *Commonweal* is handicapped by its success. The Council did

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happen. More than its liberal Protestant counterpart, *The Christian Century*, *Commonweal* has tried to stay in conversation with the ironic twists and turns in American culture and religion. More than *America*, it has an evident editorial directing hand that frequently results in interesting reading. Knowing that it cannot bask in the afterglow of its glory years, *Commonweal* is marked by an intellectual curiosity that reflects an expectation that, despite its aging readership, it will have an important role to play in the future. We hope that expectation is vindicated.

The newcomer on the Catholic scene, now twenty-one years old, is *Crisis*. Originally it was called *Catholicism in Crisis*, in direct imitation of *C&C*, founding editor Michael Novak being a great fan of Niebuhr. *Crisis* is still finding its editorial legs, but has already found a secure niche among conservative and neoconservative Catholics. It is feisty, aimed at stirring controversy, and is in no doubt about its important role in the future. There is something in every issue that you feel you must read. And we would say these positive things even if it were not edited by our friends. *New Oxford Review*, originally Anglican and now Roman Catholic, is known to run articles sometimes as interesting as the advertisements it places, seemingly everywhere, in other magazines of more general interest. On Catholic publishing, it is good to keep in mind that most of the Catholic press, unlike the Protestant, is not national. What is most read by most Catholics are the diocesan newspapers, which are as various in quality as is the Church and the culture that they reflect. (*Catholic New York*, we are glad to say, represents a very high quality.)

Of course there are numerous official denominational publications, *The Lutheran* (ELCA) being the largest. As with the Catholics, the Southern Baptist publishing enterprise is regionally dispersed in state conventions. And there are numerous "renewal" publications within the denominations, such as *Good News* among the United Methodists, and *Lutheran Forum*, with which this editor was connected for many years. There seems to be a growing number of Episcopalian newsletters and small magazines, mostly aimed at trying to sort out from an orthodox perspective the apparent theological dissolution of that communion. Then, apart from the specialized journals of the various academic guilds, there are the more general theological journals: *Theology Today* from Princeton Seminary, *Interpretation* out of Union Seminary, Virginia (strong on biblical studies), *Theological Studies* edited by the Jesuits, and the very promising new journal, *Pro Ecclesia*, which is Lutheran-based but thoroughly ecumenical.

In the Jewish community, surprisingly enough, there is very little that commands attention beyond small circles of Jewish interest. The American Jewish Congress puts out its *Congress Monthly*, which seems mostly a kind of bonus for membership. The *Forward* is still published, and, one gathers, mainly read, in New York. The big exception, of course, is *Commentary*, which has an enormous and deserved influence far beyond the Jewish community. It is published by, but only loosely connected with, the American Jewish Committee, and, while running many items of particular Jewish interest, is probably not viewed by many of its readers as being a Jewish journal.

In this brief sketch of "the competition," we have probably overlooked an obvious publication or two. But that's the general picture. In truth, we do not view any of these as competition. We like to think of them as partners in conversation, and wish there were more of them. Among the publications mentioned that have any claims to intellectual seriousness, FIRST THINGS probably has the largest actual readership. *The Christian Century* and *America* have larger institutional subscription bases, but FIRST THINGS subscribers are almost all individuals who actually pay to get the journal. More distinctively, FIRST THINGS is alone in cutting across the religious sectors (54 percent Protestant, 40 percent Catholic, with the rest Jewish and unaffiliated). So, in the hope of sounding grateful but at the risk of sounding smug, we are very pleased with our placement in the world of publishing that addresses "religion and public life."

And yet, this entire world of discourse is distressingly small. Louis Lapham of *Harper's* recently estimated that publications making any kind of intellectual demand—e.g., *Harper's*, *Atlantic*, *The New Republic*, the *New York Review of Books*, *Commentary*, FIRST THINGS—are all fishing in a potential subscription pool of perhaps no more than a million people. And that in a nation of 255 million. His estimate may be too high. The potential readership for a serious and sustained discussion of religion is no doubt much less. Put together the subscription base of *America*, *The Christian Century*, *Commonweal*, *Crisis*, *Commentary*, and FIRST THINGS and you arrive at a total of a little over one hundred thousand, and many of those readers of course subscribe to more than one.

So we are going to miss *Christianity & Crisis*. Not a lot, but we will miss it. It was one more voice attempting to inject religiously informed wisdom into a public discourse that is increasingly debased by major media that are as morally ignorant as they are religiously indifferent. We did not have much occasion to refer to *C&C* in recent years, but it was always there as a partner and adversary in conversation, and one always entertained the hope that it might one day recapture something of the purpose for which Reinhold Niebuhr, rightly,

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thought it so important. Whatever it became in the last two decades, it is necessary to remember that, back then, *C&C* was there when it was needed.

FT

POOR *TIMES*, POOR COUNTRY

Well, now we know, thanks to *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis. "The murder of a doctor in Pensacola, Fla., tells us the essential truth about most anti-abortion activists. They are religious fanatics, who want to impose their version of God's word on the rest of us. For them the end justifies any means, including violence." Lewis notes that Michael Griffin, the man charged with the killing, "had been in church last Sunday." So there you have it.

Coming through, as usual, with bigotry beyond the call of liberalism, Lewis writes anti-abortionists out of the constitutional compact. "In this country we have a constitutional bargain about religion. Individuals are guaranteed the right to choose their faith, but they may not compel others to accept their views. . . . The bargain is essential to our form of democracy, which requires compromise and does not work when there are ideological certainties. The anti-abortion activists are outside the bargain. They have all the certainty—the cold-blooded certainty—of an Ayatollah Khomeini." Lewis, seconded by a *Times* editorial on the same day, holds Ronald Reagan and George Bush responsible for "nourishing extremism" because of their support for the pro-life cause.

It is a remarkable reaction on the part of what many still consider the nation's most prestigious newspaper. As we have written elsewhere, the killing of Dr. David Gunn is to be condemned as murder, unqualifiedly. As is the killing of unborn children to be condemned. A civilization cannot tolerate private executions, as a civilization cannot long survive the license to kill unwanted human beings. Apart from condemning the killing of Dr. Gunn, Mr. Lewis and his paper have everything else exactly backwards, factually and logically.

Democracy requires compromise, we are told, and that is right. The two "no compromise" factions in the abortion debate are, on the one hand, the 20 percent who favor the present unlimited abortion license and, on the other, those who would effect a national prohibition of all abortions, which is also about 20 percent of the population. The 60 percent of Americans in between, to the extent that they can bring themselves to think about the painful subject of abortion, say they want some kind of accommodation. The first faction, those favoring the unlimited abortion license, is, at least for the moment, politically and legally triumphant. Like Mr. Lewis and his paper, they would, in their imperious success, simply exclude from the constitutional "bargain" the 80 percent of Americans who want to prohibit or contain abortion. At least they would exclude the "activists"—those who are so impertinent as to act upon their convictions.

This is elitist arrogance of breathtaking proportions. It is comparable to the arrogance of the Supreme Court in the 1992 *Casey* decision, when it declared that not the Court but the character of the nation is being "tested" by whether or not it follows the Court's five-to-four edict in support of the abortion license. The *Times* is a primary instrument in forcing premature closure on the democratic deliberation of what millions of Americans—both pro-choice and pro-life—consider the greatest moral question of our time: Who belongs to the community for which we accept common responsibility?

In their ideological certainty, the *Times* and its allies assume a don't-give-an-inch intransigence about "women's reproductive rights" that brooks absolutely no dissent. Anything outside the *Times'* circle of extremist opinion is dismissed as extremism. Reagan and Bush both received a much larger electoral vote than the *Times'* man in the White House, yet we are told that they are guilty of extremism for agreeing with the great majority of Americans that abortion should be contained, with or without a view toward eventual elimination. Who is out of touch with whom? What is the meaning of extremism in this context?

It may be a small thing, but we think not. On the day of the column and editorial in question, two-thirds of the op-ed page was devoted to the advocacy of hermaphrodite rights. Yes, hermaphrodite rights. Some children are born with sexually ambiguous genitalia, a condition usually corrected early on by surgery. The author contends that this reflects the prejudice that there are only two sexes. Such children, she contends, should be permitted to live out their ambiguity until they reach maturity and then be permitted to decide whether they want to be male or female, or continue as hermaphrodites. We are not making this up.

A paper that thinks hermaphrodite rights one of the important questions of our time, a paper that editorially endorses the worship of the great nature goddess Gaia, a paper that advocates the demonstration of condoms to fourth graders in public school, a paper that condemns as religious fanatics those who favor the protection of the unborn, a paper that derides as extremist the views

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of a majority of Americans and of two Presidents they elected, this is simply not a serious paper. The *New York Times*, editorially and in its reporting—especially on feminism, the gay-lesbian campaign, and pop culture—has in recent years become crassly partisan in an essentially frivolous way. By frivolous we mean that there is an absence of *gravitas*, of weighing of words, of love of words, of respect for words. It has become a generally vulgar and strident paper that is hostile to nuance and, it seems, editorially incapable of self-doubt or a modicum of intellectual curiosity.

Reading the *Times* today is like reading the *Village Voice* of, say, ten years ago. We are told that the business people at the *Times* like to hear that, since they are trying to reach the buppies, or whatever kids are being called these days. We are also told by insiders that the vulgarization strategy is not working, which is a modest consolation. Yet read the *Times* one must in this business. One comes away from it with intelligence insulted and more than hands dirtied, but it is the most extensive national bulletin board on what people are up to and on what the crazies in the neighborhood are thinking. What one does not expect in the *Times*, and has not been able to expect for a long time, is fair and informed editorial judgment or accurate and balanced reporting (though there are honorable exceptions among the reporters). The format is that of a traditional newspaper, the substance is increasingly that of a cheap tabloid. The consequences of this change are considerable, for, in the absence of a serious alternative, the *New York Times* is still taken to be the lodestar for the news business in this country. Poor country.

FT

A CHAPTER CLOSING, MAYBE

It seems that a small but not unimportant chapter may be closing in the culture wars. For years, gay activists have contended that AIDS puts everybody, homosexual and heterosexual alike, at risk. Medical authorities, on the other hand, have emphasized the behavior-specific nature of HIV infection and AIDS. The media strongly favored the first position. It had two chief advantages. First, it obscured, indeed attempted to deny, the fact that anybody might be responsible for getting AIDS. The disease was something that could happen to anybody, just sheer bad luck for the victims. Second, turning it into a pan-sexual epidemic justified "safe sex" programs in schools and elsewhere, providing an argument for the distribution of condoms and other measures implicitly normalizing sexual promiscuity.

Now, however, the scientific evidence has become so overwhelming that public authorities are emboldened to emphasize the need to "target" the fight against AIDS. This is happening even in New York, where a map of the city was recently published indicating the incidence of AIDS. Sections of the city where there are few or no cases are left white, sections with 400 to 1,000 cases per 100,000 adults are shaded gray, and those where there are 1,500 or more are rendered in black. It is a most revealing map. Better than half the city is white. Heavily black and Hispanic sections of the city are shaded gray, reflecting heavier drug use. Printed in black are Chelsea, SoHo, and Greenwich Village, the gay centers of the city. Most revealing, and most politically incorrect. One watches with interest to see whether the weight of facticity will change the media's coverage of AIDS as a plague that puts everybody at risk.

Lest readers be excessively cheered by evidence of a return to sanity, we note that New York City has again changed its policy with respect to sex clubs. There are dozens of these in the city, mainly male homosexual, and people go there to engage in, or to watch, group fellatio, sodomy, and sundry other perversities. There are S clubs and M clubs, and just about anything the imagination might conjure. These clubs are great places for spreading AIDS and other venereal diseases, as one might expect, and some years ago the city tried to close them. That, authorities decided, was futile. So now the city has adopted the policy of assigning "monitors" to the various clubs in order to encourage safe sex. Monitors—who presumably have an astonishing degree of erotic disinterest—are to watch the action very carefully. They have no enforcement powers, but they can, for example, point out to participants *in the throes of erotic ecstasy that their condoms are* slipping. (We are not making this up, either.)

One club advertises "HIV Positive Night." That's for men who are infected or, as hard as this may be to believe, want to become infected so that they will no longer have to worry about safe sex and all that. *The assumption is, We're all dying anyway, so we* might as well have a grand time while it lasts. It seems that that assumption is not so rare as one might think. An article in a gay publication, reprinted in the *Times*, quotes a man who explains that the least stressful condition for a gay man is to be newly infected with HIV. "I'm not going to have to live through fifty years of burying dead people. I've got another ten or fifteen years to go. Nothing's going to hit me for the next six years, and I don't have to worry about getting infected anymore."

Years ago, when AIDS was first being discussed, we were taken aback by the remark of an ordinarily

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gentle friend. "It will not become a societal crisis," she calmly observed, "because they're going to kill each other off." It seemed then an unfeeling thing to say, and still does. And yet, by the time the disease runs its course or a cure is found, it is likely that hundreds of thousands of homosexuals will have died from it. Obviously, that constitutes unspeakable human suffering, as well as a devastating blow to a "gay community" that aspires to be the motor force of social-sexual revolution.

Many have remarked on the curious way in which a sector of the population bearing a deadly disease has been able to capitalize on tragedy in order to achieve acceptance and even approval. But now the dynamics may be turning. Less than a year ago, a *Times* reporter informed us that the little red ribbon indicating sympathy for gays had become more ubiquitous than the cross as a symbol of commitment. When—aside from the Academy Award presentations—was the last time you saw someone wearing the little red ribbon? There are other ribbons in the wind, so to speak.

We know that New York City is not America (and most readers may think it is too much of America), but the failure of gays and lesbians to be included in the St. Patrick's Day parade was a crushing defeat for them. As was the firing of Joseph Fernandez and the effective abandonment of "The Rainbow Curriculum" in the public schools. As was the informal national referendum, inadvertently actuated by President Clinton, on gays in the military. As is the above-mentioned decision to "target" AIDS prevention. As is the accumulating evidence that gays constitute a far smaller percentage of the population than Kinsey had suggested. We are prepared to entertain the possibility that those gay spokesmen are right who have said, sotto voce, that their movement is losing its momentum.

A key mistake was their confusion of tolerance and indifference. Americans want to be almost infinitely tolerant, but they are not indifferent to factors that bear upon their children, and homosexuality is inescapably about children, and grandchildren. That was the big jolt to gay activists in New York. They seemed utterly surprised that parents couldn't care less about what gays did on their own time, but they were not going to let them mess with their children. An additional, and grossly mistaken, assumption of the activists was that the more people learned about gays and homosexuality the more approving they would become. That has turned out to be, at best, a highly dubious assumption.

We are not about to suggest that the gay assault on the culture has come to an end. Far from it. The institutional, personal, and financial investment in this campaign is enormous, and the media support it has recruited seems almost unanimous. But there are ribbons in the wind. The self-confidence of the movement's leaders, the arrogant supposition that they represent the inevitable course of progress, has been deeply shaken. It is not impossible that in the not too distant future gay activism as we have known it will have taken its place in the history of popular culture along with wife-swapping and "open marriages." People will still commit adultery, and Greenwich Village and San Francisco will still have their sex clubs, but few people will mistake such things for the wave of the future. In the shadows of society, subcultures will flourish in their way, but nobody will mistake them for the culture. Except, of course, in academe, where the rages of yesteryear are deeply institutionalized in ever-proliferating special studies departments.

We are not saying that the general cultural shift is going to happen. We certainly are not saying that it has happened. We are saying that it is not impossible. And that we thought you might want to know, especially if this is the day of the week on which you are tempted to think that the jig is up in the culture wars. (Our days of temptation are Tuesday and Thursday. The above item was written on Saturday.)

FT

THE SCHAEFFER LEGACY

The magazine of the Rutherford Institute devotes an issue to Francis Schaeffer of L'Abri fame and complains that his legacy is being neglected. The importance of Schaeffer on the world Christian scene is exaggerated by some. In the issue of *The Rutherford Journal,* this writer is accused, if that is the right word, of "only now discovering the truths that Francis Schaeffer championed twenty, even thirty, years ago." The author of the article continues, "Yet, strangely, Francis Schaeffer seems to be given little credit for his ground-breaking work." We have on other occasions been asked about the influence of Schaeffer on our thinking, and perhaps a word is owed especially our evangelical Protestant friends, for whom the impact of Schaeffer is indeed great.

If we are accused of cribbing from people—and we make no claims to being terribly original—we would like to plead guilty to going back somewhat farther than twenty or thirty years. To Paul, Origen, Irenaeus, Augustine, Bonaventure, Thomas, Luther, Calvin, Barth, and von Balthazar, for examples. But we can say, truly, that some of our best friends were formed in crucial ways by Francis Schaeffer and his L'Abri community in Switzerland. For many

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Evangelicals, Schaeffer, an astonishing autodidact, made accessible a large part of the history of Western thought construed according to his distinctive Christian vision. In the evangelical community, his influence was possibly only second, albeit a very distant second, to that of C. S. Lewis.

And so, although we are not aware of being significantly influenced by Schaeffer, it is easy to agree with the Rutherford folk that his contribution was, and is, enormous. At the risk of offending, however, Evangelicals would do well to expand their canon of intellectual saints. The Christian intellectual tradition does not begin with the publication of Lewis' *Mere Christianity* or with the founding of L'Abri in 1954. This is not to detract in any way from the stature of Francis Schaeffer. It is to put him in the larger Christian context where Schaeffer at his best wanted to be.

In the same issue of *The Rutherford Journal*, Mark Noll of Wheaton acknowledges the great good done by Schaeffer, but does not blink the fact that the man had very considerable weaknesses. As is common with autodidacts, he frequently popped off on questions about which he had no conspicuous knowledge. So, notes Noll, he condemned Aquinas, "judging the medieval theologian by standards that came into play, at best, six or seven hundred years after Aquinas lived." A nice touch, perhaps saying a great deal about Evangelicaldom, is that after Noll's reference to Thomas Aquinas the editors make the explanatory insertion, "[an Italian theologian and philosopher]."

Finally, John Whitehead of Rutherford offers a point that bears remembering. "With the publication of Schaeffer's book *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* in 1978, the entire complexion of Protestant Christianity began to change. Until this point, virtually no one within the evangelical community was even discussing the sanctity of human life, let alone defending it. Abortion was still characterized as a 'Catholic issue.'" For that alone, and that is far from all that he did, Francis Schaeffer deserves to be celebrated with gratitude.

FT

WHILE WE'RE AT IT

■ Michael Medved, author of *Hollywood vs. America: Popular Culture and the War on Traditional Values* (HarperCollins), is not alone, but he is notable among those who have exposed the ideologically driven corruption of the movie industry. It is not money or audiences or the market (the three being much the same) that explains the human and artistic degradation of films, but a manifest desire to toe the political line and win the plaudits of peers in the little world that is Hollywood. These were points made at a recent gathering of conservatives, and Jack Valenti, President of the Motion Picture Association of America, was given a chance to respond. He reacted with a rather remarkable exercise in brazen denial. "About 90 percent of your neighbors are God-fearing families, good people raising their children right, but over there there's a wife beater, in the next block there's a child molester, and over there is someone who is a former embezzler. Neighborhoods and the movie industry are the same." Perhaps sensing that he was being less than entirely persuasive, Mr. Valenti came up with his clinching argument: "So I'm saying to you, what can and ought to be done? That's the issue. Who draws the line? Who is the guardian of the morality, the ideology, and the title deeds of freedom in this country? And who is going to guard those guardians?" In response to the question *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*, it would never have occurred to us to suggest Jack Valenti. It does very strongly occur to us, however, to suggest that Mr. Valenti stop making a fool of himself in public by arguing, as he does, that the quality of Hollywood's product is determined by popular demand. "The marketplace makes the decision," says he. "You make the decision." No, Mr. Valenti, those who pay your salary make the decisions, and you would spare yourself a good deal of embarrassment by being less obviously their flack. As Medved and others have shown, the great majority of Americans have pretty consistently decided against most of the worst of Hollywood's excretions. Which seems only to stir the industry's "creative" people to be more unimaginatively outrageous still, counting, as they can, on Mr. Valenti to assure the public that there's nobody there but us ordinary Americans. (Mr. Valenti's speech is in *TV etc.*, a publication available from the Media Research Center, 113 S. West St., Alexandria, VA 22314.)

■ We don't know which of the several people from antiquity named Aristides the editor of *The American Scholar* has in mind, but under that name Joseph Epstein runs a quarterly rumination that is as engagingly and sprawlingly self-indulgent as anything in contemporary publishing. We read it without fail, and with frequent envy of its grace of expression. This quarter, Aristides the Just (or is it Aristides the Wise?) turns his leisured attention to the question of taste and related phenomena such as fashion. Georg Simmel wrote in "Psychology of Fashion" that there are "classes and individuals who demand constant change . . . [and who] find in fashion something that keeps pace with their own soul-movements." Aristides-Epstein picks up on that: "Yet, I sometimes wonder, why does my own

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soul move so differently? Why am I not among the people who seem able to change styles, adopt new fashions, turn in their taste so regularly and so easily? Why is it that I myself prefer to remain in the outer purlieus of fashion, far from the chic and madding crowd, content to indulge in my own mildly out-of-it tastes? Is this owing to my temperament, upbringing, reason, propensity for moral judgment? I think perhaps it is because I have for a long while conceived of my life as a small work of art—a minor sculpture, perhaps, or a miniature portrait—while people who can change their tastes from week to week think of their lives as, perhaps, a television series or the nightly news. However ineptly I have shaped this work of art I strive to make of my life, I cannot suddenly recast it, switch to all black clothes, pierce an ear, go about in cowboy boots. I grow old, I grow old, I shall wear my trousers with a one-and-a-half-inch cuff and a slight break at the ankle."

■ If the St. Patrick's Day parade is not religious in nature, it is subject to New York's anti-discrimination laws and cannot exclude gays and lesbians. If it is religious, it is a violation of church and state since it requires police and other cooperation from the city. That was the argument of William M. Kunstler of the Center for Constitutional Rights. "Asked if his position would forbid any religious event in a public place, Mr. Kunstler said, 'I guess I am saying that.' " The suit didn't get anywhere, but it was a nice try and a perfectly logical extension of what many lawyers think is meant by the separation of church and state.

■ Before Jim killed Artie, the Mitchell brothers were pretty much the kings of hard-core pornography films. Their lawyers had taught them that nothing could be prosecuted successfully — if there is one costume, one prop, one anything that suggests a plot or a moral, the case would be dismissed on First Amendment grounds. John Hubner has written a book about the Mitchells (*Bottom Feeders*, Doubleday), and he has this to say about the nature of pornography: "Leftists and countercultural types were attracted to pornography because there is something deeply subversive about the explicit display of sex. Sex strips away identities it takes a lifetime to build. A naked aroused man is not a brain surgeon or a university president or a Methodist bishop. He is an animal with an erection."

■ Garry Wills writes in the *New York Review of Books* on the marvelous exhibit at the Library of Congress, "Rome Reborn: The Vatican Library and Renaissance Culture." The rebirth of Rome was largely the consequence of Pope Nicholas V recruiting Fra Angelico to take charge of the artistic renaissance. As good as this was for art, Wills has misgivings. "Yet Angelico accepted Nicholas' scheme to make the tomb of Peter, not the tomb of Jesus, the new center of the Church," writes Wills. A tomb, any tomb, the center of the Church? And Nicholas, generally acknowledged as the most moral of Renaissance popes (admittedly, the competition was not stiff), was, after all, the bishop of Rome not the bishop of Jerusalem. Further, what possible significance has Peter apart from Jesus? The charge against good pope Nicholas is really quite silly.

■ St. John the Divine, the Episcopal cathedral up on Morningside Heights, draws thousands of people and animals to the "blessing of the animals" rite on the day of St. Francis. Jim Holt took his dog that had been misbehaving rather severely, and writes about the results in *The New Republic*. "At the end of the service—whose liturgy was as interminable and exotic as Haile Selassie's coronation mass—I escorted Doogie to the bishop for his hallowing. 'May you be the means by which your master spreads love and reconciliation throughout the world,' he intoned at my sullen pup. Hey, I thought, this is supposed to be about the four-legged one's virtue, not mine! As we departed the cathedral grounds Doogie snapped savagely at a little girl who tried to pet him. The grace had no effect; he was as demonic as ever. Episcopalians have weak magic—this hound needs an exorcist."

■ Frank Perdue advertises, "It takes a tough man to make a tender chicken." Empire Kosher Kitchen picked up on that with billboards declaring, "It Takes An Even Tougher Man to Make a Kosher Chicken." This with a dramatic picture of Moses delivering the decalogue amidst the thunder and lightning on Sinai. Perdue is suing Empire for infringement of copyright. We have yet to hear anyone raise the question of blasphemy. In large parts of our culture, it would seem that the term is obsolete. One might hope, however, that even those who do not know the meaning of blasphemy might have a vestigial sense of what is truly tacky.

■ With this administration there has been a good deal of talk about "sin taxes," notably on liquor and alcohol. Not much attention has been paid what might be called the sin tax bonus when it comes to living together out of wedlock (savor the phrase, you haven't seen it in print for ages). Ellen Schultz of the *Wall Street Journal* has done the calculations, including both federal income taxes and Social Security tax. A single mother with two children and a single father with one child each earn $12,000 and each file as head of household. Each receives money back from the government as a result of earned income credit. If they get married, however, they lose the earned income credit and their effective tax rate jumps to 45 percent. The consequence is that they pay the government $3,575 as a penalty for having married. Under existing law, the sin tax bonus for staying single is impressive. The odd thing is that the Clinton tax plan would, according to

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Schultz, raise the sin tax bonus, a.k.a. the marriage penalty, for the same two people to $4,040. Living together and not getting married also gives definite, although not such dramatic, tax advantages to those described as the affluent and wealthy. Since tax law is, in large part, designed to create incentives and disincentives, one wonders what those folk in Washington have in mind, if they do.

■ Religious leadership types pronouncing on matters political seldom say they're sorry when they're demonstrated to have been woefully wrong. But there are rare exceptions. Forty-one Church of England bishops signed a manifesto, *Cruelty and Christian Conscience: Bishops Say No to Fur,* pledging that they would never again wear anything with fur. Auberon Waugh reports: "As the Bishop of Worcester put it: 'I am glad to pledge that I do not buy or wear fur. I deplore the cruelty associated with the taking of the pelts of animals when other fabrics are available.' When someone reminded him that bishops wore fur-trimmed robes at the State Opening of Parliament, this amiable man replied: 'I hadn't thought of that. I've got one upstairs. I've only worn it once and I suppose I will wear it again. What a humbug I am. It's difficult to take an absolute stance on anything in this life. You may say that you don't think furs should be worn, but it's difficult to avoid it on occasion.'" Other bishops had no second thoughts, insisting that they would never again wear their fur-bedecked parliamentary robes, thus preventing unspeakable pain to long-dead animals who contributed to the trimmings.

■ "New Jersey courts have a chance to set a price on the human soul," announces the *National and International Religion Report.* "Four Roman Catholic families are suing the church for loss of faith. Three say the church did nothing when confronted with allegations that Florencia Pineda Tumang, 70, former pastor of St. Mary of the Lakes in Medford, molested their daughters in 1990. The other family says its daughter was victimized because the church did not intervene. The families say the deception they experienced caused them to lose faith, but they still believe 'there is no salvation outside the church.' Therefore, they seek damages for their eternal damnation. Named in the suit are the Trenton Diocese and several officials, the parish, and Tumang. The priest, charged last year with fondling one of the girls, has left the area and may be hiding in the Philippines." The moral sleaziness aside, the illogic of the suit is not without interest. The plaintiffs would seem to have to demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt their strong faith that they have lost their faith, plus their belief that they are eternally damned for having betrayed the faith to which, at least in part, they so fervently hold. We expect the Jersey court will decide to pass on this one.

■ "Altruism is the driving force that motivates doctors who perform abortions, and that may not be enough," says Dr. David Grimes of the University of California at San Francisco. The story here says that many abortionists are older doctors who remember the botched abortions of the pre-*Roe* era and are "altruistically" motivated to provide a legal and "safe" alternative. Younger doctors aren't attracted to sitting all day in a clinic bespattered by blood as they suction out, cut up, or otherwise terminate the babies of anonymous patients. Planned Parenthood complains that only 12.4 percent of medical schools now routinely teach how to do abortions. The reason given by the *Times* for the small number of abortionists is that they are afraid of anti-abortionist activists. The half-page account does make this allowance: "And, of course, some doctors are unwilling to perform abortions because of deeply felt religious or ethical concerns." As the Clinton administration increases the incidence of abortion through government funding, the shortage of doctors who will actually do the dastardly deed may intensify. The answer of Planned Parenthood and others is to allow nurses and "physician assistants" to do it. Abortion clinics today are notoriously unregulated and the associated medical personnel usually less than third-rate. The abortion industry is determined to keep it that way, in the name of preventing government interference in "reproductive rights." This seems to be one area where government funding is not accompanied by a demand for government regulation. Anyway, wholesale abortion at the medicaid clinic is for "them." The people who advocate and determine policy on these matters, Mrs. Clinton's reform plans notwithstanding, will always have superior medical care available to them, also when it comes to getting rid of inconvenient children.

■ When a bishop or someone else in church authority says he's going to handle a problem "pastorally," it is usually meant that it will be handled in a gentle, caring way. Of course sometimes it means that it will not be handled at all, especially when it is a matter of dealing with folk who do really seem to be working for the Opposition. A Jesuit correspondent who prefers not to be named in this connection recently wrote some reflections on the changing meaning of dealing with problems pastorally. "I suppose the whole notion of episcopal responsibility hinges on the meaning of the term 'pastoral.' The older idea of being a shepherd assumed, without any argument or basis in fact, that sheep were somehow of more intrinsic value than wolves. Therefore the unenlightened shepherd segregated and even ghettoized his sheep so as to feed and nurture them *at the expense of the carnivores!* Lupine experience and lupine values had almost no part in their considerations. But when you think about it, is wolf fur less warm than wool? Do

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she-wolves love their cubs less than ewes their lambkins? Is it not the merest prejudice and irrational ovicentric shepherdhood that excludes wolves from the ambit of pastoral care? In a complex, pluralist, and diverse ecosystem, the sensitive shepherd will of course draw on the wisdom and beauties of the Western Pastoral Tradition, but he or she will also realize that the experience of the flock (with its notoriously 'herd-like' mentality) can be broadened by exposure to new and exciting concepts of nutrition and structures of interspecies contact. Does this mean we are ashamed of our heritage? Not at all! Today's Good Shepherd will not rest content until the Lupine Community has 'internalized' all that is nourishing in our Catholic system, and nary a bleat will mar the peace of our global meadow."

Sources: *New York Times* editorials and articles on abortion, Dr. Gunn, and hermaphrodite rights, March 12, 1993. Targeting AIDS prevention, *New York Times*, March 7, 1993; on advantages of having HIV, *New York Times*, November 30, 1992. On Francis Schaeffer's legacy, *The Rutherford Journal*, March 1993.

WHILE WE'RE AT IT: "Aristides" on taste and fashion, *American Scholar*, Spring 1993. William Kunstler on church-state separation, *New York Times*, March 11, 1993. Garry Wills on Pope Nicholas V, *New York Review of Books*, February 11, 1993. Jim Holt on the blessing of animals at St. John the Divine, *The New Republic*, March 8, 1993. On Perdue and Kosher chickens, *New York Times*, March 12, 1993. Ellen Schultz analysis of "sin taxes," *Wall Street Journal*, March 9, 1993. On Church of England bishops and fur, *The Spectator* (London), January 2, 1993. New Jersey families suing RC Church for loss of faith, *National and International Religion Report*, March 22, 1993. On abortion industry, *New York Times*, March 31, 1993.

Possessed

Lord have mercy on my son for he is a lunatic, and sore vexed:
for ofttimes he falleth into the fire and ofttimes into the water.
— Matthew 17:15

The devil is a man, not unlike
a father who has his faults.
He can't help but take hold
beneath the blue flame of vein and skin.
He will not be moved, divided from the body
he has made his own image.

Once in fire to forge a dagger,
Once in water to still this breath,
Yet the stink of life lingers.

We cannot kill what we do not own,
fighting for repossession, dying
to save the self, to be set free.
There is always a man waiting, our father,
wanting the way a father wants:
to cast, to reel, fisher of men.

Carol E. Miller

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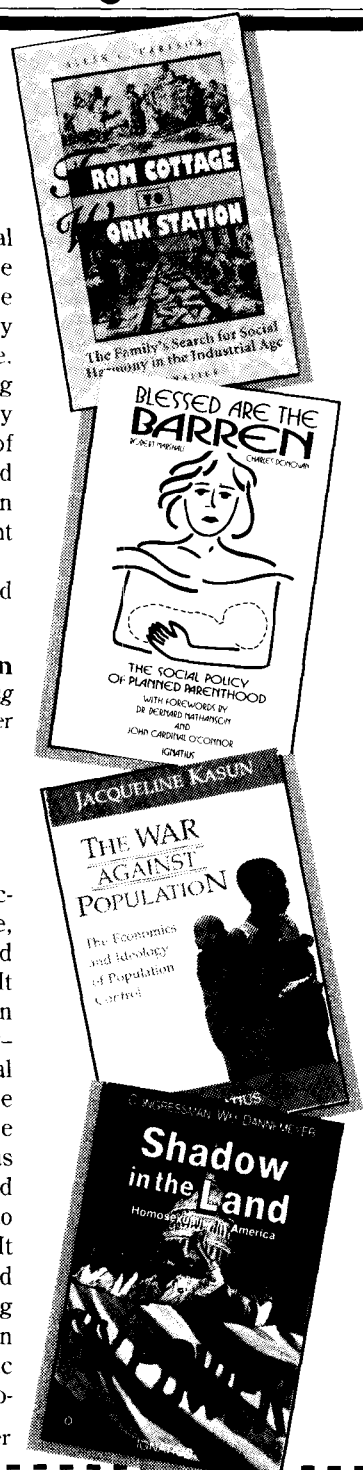
FIGHTING for SURVIVAL of the family and humanity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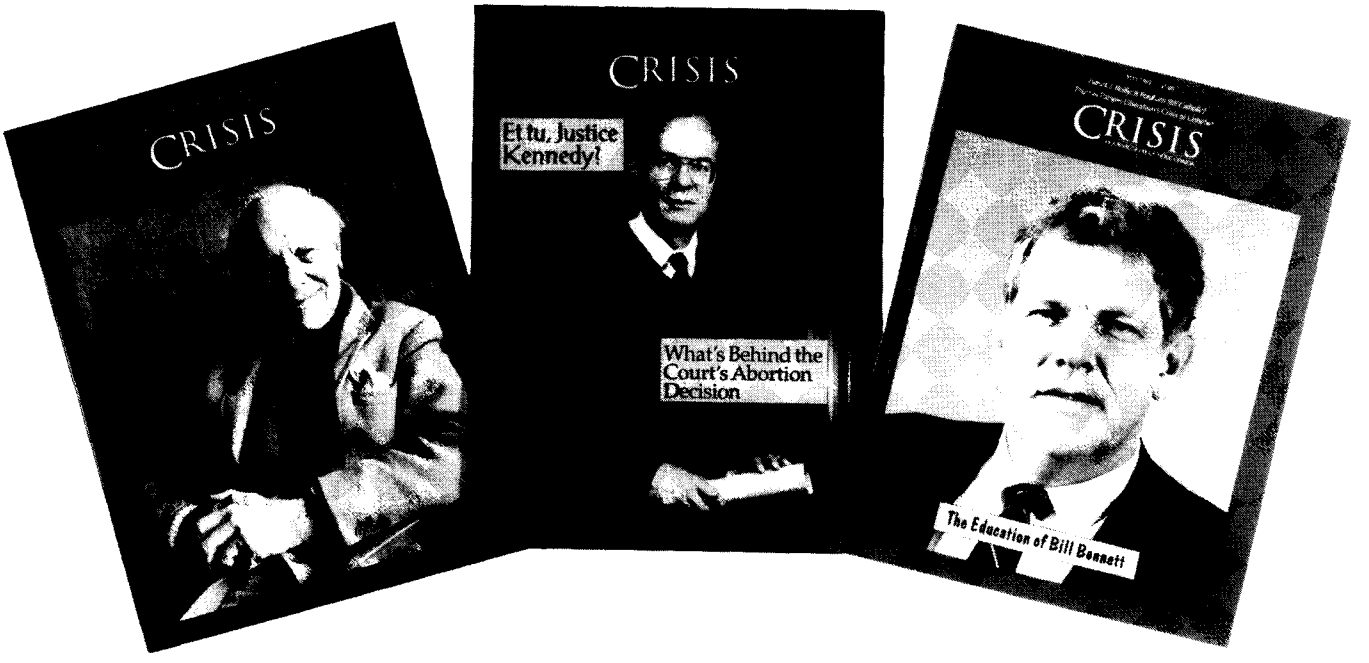

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(Some of the material is edited & updated from the earlier PERSPECTIVES series.)

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